
Using XOOPS in the Religious Community - News

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This article was inspired by [this thread](#) in the forums. It caused me to gather longstanding thoughts about ministry and CMS's, particularly XOOPS.

As a result of that forum thread, I gave some thought to the use of Xoops in religious communities. Here in Dallas, where religion and tech go hand in hand (which, I suppose, has it's own issues), it seems that every church has a web site. Indeed, they are ubiquitous. Most of them go unused, have stale content, and reflect little of the interactivity that we experience here at xoops.

When my work as a chaplain with the terminally ill weighs me down, I occasionally pass by churches and other religious organizations, and imagine making a living by introducing these organizations to the wonder of xoops. Most churches address the need of a web site by having Deacon Susie cobble one together on a copy of Joe's HTML Wonder Editor (freeware, of course). The site looks every inch the work of an amateur. Or, perhaps, they send out the changes they want made to the web developer on the other side of town (or the other side of the world). They then pray (a fitting word) that what appears on their screen when the guru gets to it three weeks later appears roughly as they wanted it. Religious organizations feel the need for a useful web presence, but feel that they have neither the time, money, nor the technical savvy to implement such a presence.

Enter the Content Management System (CMS - which in my opinion is synonymous with Xoops). Xoops allows organizations with a minimum of training and expense to implement a highly interactive and sophisticated internet presence. How can Xoops benefit your organization? I can think of several ways in which XOOPS can enhance the work of ministry.

Support Ever have the feeling that you were supposed to be doing something at your organization at 8AM this morning and you have completely forgotten what it was? Xoops has just the answer. Twenty-four, seven, there is a module on your organization's site that reminds you of the location and activity that you are trying to remember. No more calls to the rabbi at 7:45AM trying to find out what it was you forgot.

Congregations benefit from knowing who other members are, and how to reach them. One of the regulars here, Chainsaw, noted in the thread cited at the beginning, that his church uses the Xdirectory module. He also mentions two other modules that he uses: the job listing module, and the project module.

Similarly, forums, ecards (Does XOOPS have an ecard module?), and private messaging of the kind we have here on XOOPS forums can allow parishioners to keep in contact with one another, support each other during rough times, and be made aware of congregational needs. It would even allow those who are shut in to have access to the support they miss so very much.

Additionally, one might implement the Short Message Service to send short text messages to keep in contact with pastoral care staff (of course, making sure that we monitor carefully our own boundaries).

Use of some of the new contact modules might also help pastoral staff to be made aware with greater

specificity of congregational needs. For instance, one of the customizable contact form modules might be used to alert staff that a parishioner needs a pastoral care visit, and might also show which hospital or nursing home the patient is at. Those of us who work with hospices would be glad if some of our large churches had this kind of resource. We could easily let the church know (once we have the requisite HIPAA authorization!) that the church's webmaster is now on hospice (he became ill from overwork!).

Education The web can be an ideal resource to enhance one's understanding of the religious organization's beliefs and practices. Again, xoops has great resources in this regard and is improving all the time. It might be possible to use the web to help prepare prospective members. Xoops now has modules that feature tutorials and dictionaries/wordlists. One could use an FAQ module to explain what kinds of resources the church has available, steps to becoming a member, etc.

Staff might also use one of the review modules or one of the bookstore modules to let members know about the latest book they have read that has been helpful. They may make reference to a media resource that the congregation might benefit from.

Access We hinted at this one before, but will hone in on it here. Many of my patients have no way to get to their religious organization due to the chronic or terminal illness that they have. Access to a web presence that allows them to interact decreases their sense of loneliness, and enhances their sense of empowerment. What if they had access to the messages or religious training via downloads such as MP3's (many religious organizations are already beginning to do this)? As I write this, I can imagine each shut-in parishioner having an MP3 player (We are speaking ideally, aren't we?), where either they are another member of the congregation can update the player with the latest messages, and the one who is ill can have the messages handy. Indeed, download modules can provide access to several different kinds of media day or night, all of which may decrease the sense of isolation.

Money No minister can get through a sermon without mentioning money. As in any other endeavor, it takes money to run ministries. The Xoops Donation module might be an excellent resource for this.

Content Management Systems in general, and Xoops in particular, provide tools that enable religious organizations of all sizes to improve the work that they are doing by: being better stewards of their time and money; by enhancing the quality, accessibility, and frequency of communication; and by increasing the real-time access to support resources that are so much a part of the religious community life. Nothing, of course, substitutes for the personal touch.