



Having trouble keeping track of things?

MyChurch Events™ Streamlines Church Calendar

by Lisa Johns

Maintaining a calendar for an active, growing church can be a monumental task, especially for church staff already stretched to their limits! You need to coordinate schedules of the pastor, lay leaders, ministries, small groups and youth activities. In addition, you have to schedule space within your building(s), plan special events and handle last-minute time or location changes.

And if you're also responsible for maintaining your church Web site, providing the church webmaster with up-to-date information and distributing ever-changing information to those who need it, you can quickly become overwhelmed.

Active congregations have outgrown the calendars that were once photocopied on pastel paper, folded, stapled and mailed monthly. Church bulletins can still help to keep people up to date. Yet, in today's globally connected world with instant messaging and e-mail, even weekly updates seem inadequate.

Isn't there a better way for church staffers to maintain, publish and distribute an up-to-date, church-wide calendar? Like other churches, New Life Christian Ministries found itself asking this question. As a new church, however, we didn't have an "office" in which to work, nor the

budget for regular mailings. We needed to communicate events, times, locations and other details with one another and with the community if we were to function. The only logical solution was to harness the Web.

From the start, it was obvious that New Life needed a Web site. My primary responsibility as New Life's webservant was to make that idea a reality (www.newlifexn.org). Although at first the site served as our virtual bulletin board to all who were interested, as New

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“WOW! I just edited my logo and added a picture of the church. It was soooooo easy I was shocked. This is the greatest online tool I have ever seen. I don't know why everyone isn't using it! It's just too cool. And you don't have to have a Ph.D. in computers to use it. Thank you so much!”
— Jean Lamb,
Gore United Methodist Church

Life grew so did the number of events to promote, schedules to track and people to inform. Thus, the development and maintenance of our site and church-wide calendar turned into a complex task.

As the site changed from merely a means to communicate who we were and what we were doing to a ministry in itself, we needed a simple tool to track what was happening both on- and off-line.

Thankfully, we discovered **MyChurch Events** from Communication Resources. This interactive Web site calendar plug-in is designed to simplify the process of maintaining a church-wide calendar for both internal and external purposes. For a very reasonable price (less than \$5/month), it solves many of the distribution problems and scheduling conflicts that can occur with off-line calendars. By nature, it assures that everyone with an Internet connection has access to the events on the calendar whenever they choose to view them.

As a Web-based calendar, **MyChurch Events** is easy for people with minimal computer skills to use. Users just sign up for the service, add in the church name and logo and start entering event titles, times, locations and descriptions on the calendar, similar to the way you would type them for an off-line calendar. You can enter recurring events (such as weekly Bible studies and meetings) once and have them display on all dates you select: daily, weekly, monthly, annually or whenever you want them to occur – even years in advance!

Not only is this calendar useful to event schedulers, but church and community members find it helpful as well. Site visitors can click on a particular calendar event to view the description, time, length and location; obtain a map and directions to that location (provided by Expedia.com); and “Tell a Friend” or receive an e-mail reminder of that particular event. Such features give churches a no-cost way to promote activities.

You can also hyperlink words in the description to pages in your Web site for those interested in exploring deeper. By linking the calendar directly to your church Web site, site visitors can easily click through to all activities the church has scheduled for a particular time period.

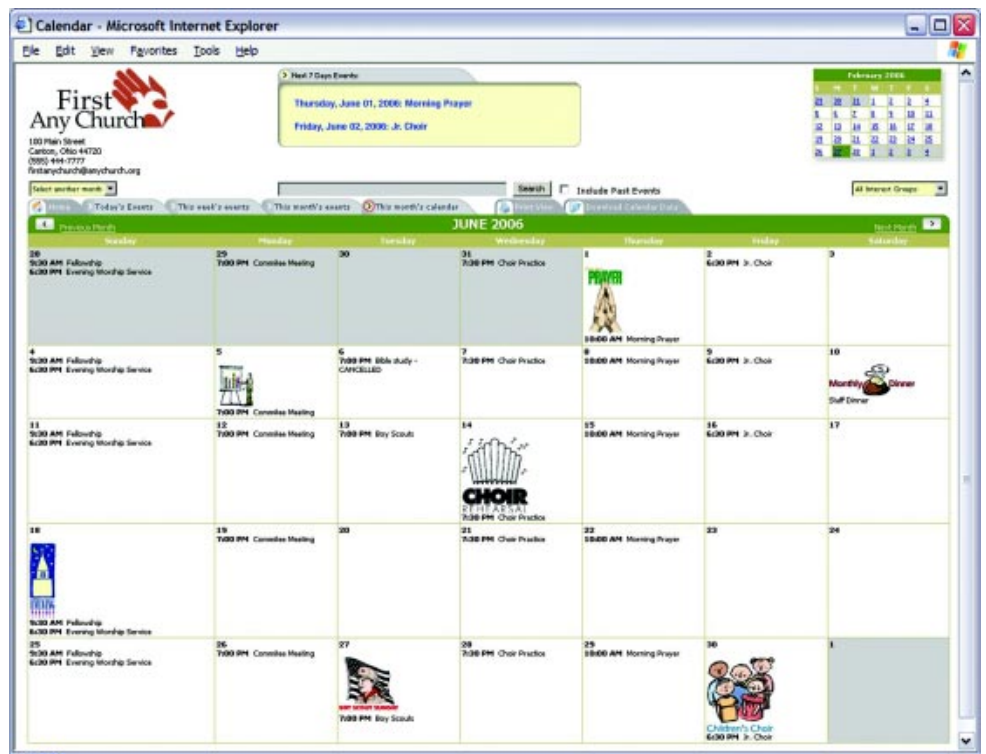
You can customize the calendar view to appear as a one-month calendar (in table form), or a list of events by month, week or day. Visitors can view current and future events, making it easy for them to coordinate the church calendar with their own personal calendars in advance. For example, parents can check summer events in time to plan for their children to attend vacation Bible school and church camp, well before they receive summer sports schedules.

Say you want to show when Pentecost will be in 2007. By choosing to update your holidays and selecting which ones you want listed on your calendar, you can insert traditional Christian holidays, secular holidays and many other days you probably haven’t even considered.

Much more than an electronic version of a wall calendar, **MyChurch Events** allows staff and visitors to view the church calendar in several different ways. In addition to seeing the whole month at once, or at-a-glance activity lists for a particular time period, the calendar can also be filtered through special interest groups. This feature allows those interested in recovery ministries or singles ministries, for example, to find the activities that most appeal to them without having to sift through all church events, such as children’s ministries or youth activities.

In addition, certain events can be designated for viewing only by the church staff, elders or other authorized individuals. This allows the church secretary to help coordinate each pastor’s schedule with the church-wide calendar, while keeping counseling sessions and publication deadlines confidential.

Church webmasters aren’t limited to linking to the standard monthly calendar page. **MyChurch Events** lets them plug an automatically updated list of the day’s or week’s events into any page of their site. New Life uses this feature to



automatically show each day's events on its home page. Not only does this give our home page the appearance of daily updating, but it also saves us the time and energy required to present all calendar events on the most prominent page of our site as they are scheduled to occur.

MyChurch Events contains several more useful features. Thousands of clip art images – all of those available with an annual subscription to www.ChurchArt.com (\$49.95) – are included in this calendar package at no extra charge to make key events stand out and give the calendar visual appeal. These graphics allow you to feature special activities or remind visitors of upcoming holidays. You can easily choose from a selection of fonts and colors to customize the calendar to match the style of your church Web site.

Going well beyond good graphic design, **MyChurch Events** helps staff members manage church resources by coordinating the use of rooms and equipment, including audio/video equipment and the church van or bus. This feature helps avoid conflicts that arise when, for example, two groups plan to use the only DVD player in different parts of the building at the same time. What's more, the calendar can actually help you improve your church's events by providing a convenient way for attendees to send organizers immediate or delayed feedback about each event.

Importantly, **MyChurch Events** hasn't overlooked the security of your church calendar. Only those with proper authorization can add or edit calendar information. This can include as many or as few people as you deem necessary.

Other key features include the ability to view and print calendar pages in a readable format and to download the calendar data into other programs. And if you wish to send out regular printed calendars, you can choose from several different printing options, including vertical or horizontal layout and the ability to print pages with or without private events. If you use Microsoft Outlook, Lotus or any calendar software that can receive comma-delimited text files, you can export the data directly from **MyChurch Events** to your computer or PDA.

Communication Resources recommends that **MyChurch Events** be used with Internet Explorer 5.5 or later on a Windows-based PC for best results. However, it can be viewed through other browsers and Macintosh computers. To make it as easy as possible for church staffers to determine whether this is the right calendar package for them, **MyChurch Events** is available with a risk-free trial. For those who decide this is the best calendar for their church, **MyChurch Events** is a continuous subscription (that can be stopped at any time) billed annually (\$59.95). The most you have to lose would be about 10 minutes of your time setting up the calendar and linking it to your site!

MyChurch Events is also available as part of **ChurchArt Online Plus** (www.ChurchArt.com), an online art library that includes a new online Caption Editor and **MyChurch Birthdays**. Communication Resources offers a full refund for those who are not completely satisfied with their products. For more information, visit www.MyChurchEvents.com or call toll-free 1 800 992-2144.

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