

# Be Not Afraid!

by Joanna Carrell, Sally Falk and Rachel Simpson  
Shaky hands, sweaty forehead, dry mouth ... No, it's not public speaking that's striking fear in the hearts of ministers everywhere, it's networking online!

"Oh, my church is covered. We already **have** a website," you say. But that's not the same thing. Your website is just sitting there waiting for people to discover it. Don't wait for them to come to you, go where the people are!

So where **are** all these people? They're connecting with each other on social networking sites. They're also searching for entertainment and inspiration in the form of videos, blogs (short for "web logs") and podcasts (audio broadcasts) online.

People spend hours online each day, shopping, emailing, and searching for information. With social networking sites being five of the top ten websites in the world, they have become major players in this online information frenzy. MySpace has over 100 million users and gets 300,000 new subscribers each day—most being over the age of 30. So take a deep breath and let's get networking!



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## How do these things work, anyway?

### MySpace & Facebook

On these sites, you can create your own single web page within the website. You can post your church web and street address, church news, event photos, blog entries, audio, video and anything else you want people to know on this "profile" page. People can also send messages to you and post comments on your page.

After you have set up your page, you can search for congregants, church staff, etc. to add to your "friends" list (and people can search for your church to add to their list). This is how you connect with others. Ideally, someone will see your church listed on her friend's MySpace or Facebook page, and she'll say to herself, "What's that Unity church all about? My friend John seems to like it, so maybe it's something I would like too." Then she views your church's profile, goes to your website, and hopefully becomes involved in your church.

### YouTube/GodTube

When you sign up for YouTube, you again get your own web page, known on YouTube as your "channel." Here, you can upload your own videos (up to 10 minutes in length) and even display other people's videos on your channel. This is a great way to post meditations and highlights from your Sunday services or workshops. Most of the content on GodTube is from "traditional" Christian denominations.

### Blogging

A blog is an online diary. People write blogs about all kinds of

# Dive In!

by Rachel Simpson

Jamie Sanders, at Unity of Pensacola, Florida, set up a MySpace page for his church. He shared a bit about his experience with us:

## What have been the effects of having your church on MySpace?

We are finding that we have many hits to the page and each week new people are asking to be our friends, etc. A friend of mine once said, "Exposure is exposure, baby...." The more we can share the energy and message of Unity the better—it is for all of us in the movement.

## How does your church use MySpace (and has it been an effective tool)?

I post pictures of our people, along with upbeat music, and I have added some inspirational videos as well. People locally have come to the service because of what they found on the MySpace page. It is another great tool for reaching out.

## Was it easy to get set up? Have there been hiccups?

I have found that it was pretty easy to set up.... I have to constantly log in and check who has messaged or who is sending a friend's request, but it is always fun to see who is checking out the site and leaving messages.

things—family, hobbies, business practices, etc. Then others search for blogs that interest them, and post comments about what the “blogger” has written. Imagine: You touch on a topic in a Sunday service, but don’t have time to go into further detail. You say “I’ll have more about this on my blog this week. Let me know what you think.” (The address of your blog is of course printed in the Sunday bulletin everyone is holding.) Congregants go to your blog and post their thoughts and questions about what you’ve written. What a great way for congregants to connect with each other and with you, and for you to see that they are “getting” your message!

## Podcasting

Podcasts are pieces of audio that you can place on any webpage, including the sites listed above. People can listen to them right there on the webpage, or download them to an audio player (i-pod® or other MP3 player) and listen to them “on the go.” The advantage to podcasts is that anyone in the world can listen to your service, workshop, music, or meditation. Your congregation can grow infinitely without having to find a bigger building. Now **that** is a church without walls.

Perhaps the best thing about these sites is that you can join them for free. They also work together: you can post videos from YouTube on your MySpace page, link to your blog from MySpace, and so on.

## Is it Safe?

Safety is a main concern people first have about joining a social networking site. But have no fear. On all of these sites, you have complete control over what shows up on your page. You have to “approve” before someone is listed as your friend. You can also make sure that anyone else’s comment is approved by you before it is posted.

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## Here are just a few of the Unity churches that are already on MySpace. Look at the “Friends” lists on these pages to find even more Unity centers.

[www.myspace.com/unityofpensacola](http://www.myspace.com/unityofpensacola)  
[www.myspace.com/unitychurchnacogdoches](http://www.myspace.com/unitychurchnacogdoches)  
[www.myspace.com/unitycenteraustin](http://www.myspace.com/unitycenteraustin)  
[www.myspace.com/unityofdivinelove](http://www.myspace.com/unityofdivinelove)  
[www.myspace.com/ingu](http://www.myspace.com/ingu)  
[www.myspace.com/iyouaisummit](http://www.myspace.com/iyouaisummit)

## Other sites that are doing great things with video, music, and more:

[www.cor.org](http://www.cor.org) Church of the Resurrection. Use of video appeals to different learning styles. Their teen site, [rezlifekc.org](http://rezlifekc.org), is hip and current and has parent info.

[www.generationaxis.com](http://www.generationaxis.com) Willow Creek’s young adult site has graphics and music that is of the generation.

[www.se.nextgenerationofunity.com](http://www.se.nextgenerationofunity.com) Southeast region’s Next Generation of Unity page. Content and calendar are current. Photos are arranged by event which draws participants to the site.

## How do I do this?

A simple “fill in the blank” process will get you up and running on these sites. After initial setup, maintenance is minimal. Many churches already send email updates or printed newsletters— simply copy and paste this information into a blog or MySpace bulletin to keep your page updated (in fact, emailing your newsletter and/ or writing a blog instead of mailing a paper newsletter is a great way to reduce your church’s carbon footprint). Keep in mind that social networking sites help people find you. Just give people a taste of what you’re about and point them to your website to learn more.

If you still don’t feel comfortable doing these things yourself, draw on the resources you have in your congregation:

- Many congregants with families have digital video cameras. Ask if someone is willing to tape the service and download it to a computer.
- Set up a technical volunteer position with a title. Teens want this kind of experience on their college applications and this gives them a chance to get more involved in the church.