

# Case Study: Parkside Church



## THE RELATIONSHIP

Parkside Church brings the term “neoclassic” to the web. The entrance to the church building is framed by stone engravings and Roman columns that surround the building. While the structure may not be ancient, visitors definitely feel the connection to deep roots of history and faith. However, upon entering its double-wide doors and encountering the congregation, one also feels the buzz of change. There is nothing “dusty” about the way things happen at Parkside. So it is with the way they approached their web efforts.

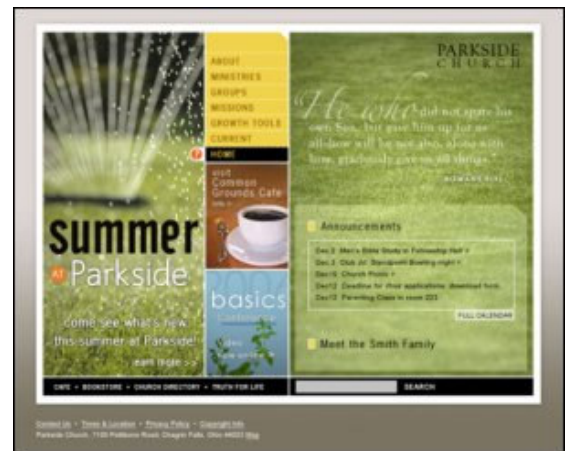
It is always a breath of fresh air for the Silas Partners team to hear the words “we want the web to become the central communication tool for our church.” It’s a bold vision, one that will be challenged by tradition and the digital divide. However, through consistent steps, Parkside is doing just that.

### Building for Growth

The influential architect Louis Henri Sullivan is known for saying “form ever follows function.” This is what the Silas Partners team aimed for in constructing the Parkside website. The structure and use of the website was thought through with an eye towards future development before the look of the new site was even selected. Choosing the right technology was vital. Assessing the church’s needs, Silas Partners guided the church to an integrated content management system that includes an online bookstore, mass email capabilities, and online event registration.

Some progressive web ministries look for integrated web platforms that can manage every aspect of a constituents’ relationship with the organization. However, when theory meets reality, not all churches are ready to make the organizational changes necessary to take full advantage of such systems. Understanding that one-size does not fit all, Silas Partners evaluated the church’s existing business processes and recognized that it made sense to take a point-solution approach with certain online operations.

For example, the church’s offline database possessed an online module that would allow church members to log-in and update their information. Thus Silas Partners helped Parkside’s staff take advantage of this module to allow for reduced time in updating members’ contact information with minimal administrative disruptions.



*Changing homepage theme provides flexibility*

A challenge in any website design is how to translate the church’s life, priorities, and personality through shapes, colors, pictures, and words. Silas Partners aimed for a look that mirrored the uniqueness of the church, a blend of seriousness and fun with a classics and contemporary look.

The “eureka!” moment came with the concept of a website without a header. The look was developed to step away from the usual brochure format and place the church’s activities front and center. The homepage is treated as an ad that also works as the site’s design theme. Through the

## SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Website visits increased by 230%, from 30,000 to 84,000 visits per month, within the first two months of the site launch.

The website’s average of 12,000 unique visitors per month vastly exceeds the church’s 2,000 members

Provided flexible homepage design to maximize ministry promotion

Strategic development calendars are defined and followed

Church Administrators realize savings in time and financial resources by web enabling registrations and address updates

Print materials were redesigned based on website branding



flexible layout, there is ability to regularly change the look and feel of the site without making the user feel lost from month to month.

## The Solution

### Incremental Progress

Does a church really need to think strategically about the web? Parkside's answer is a resounding "Yes!" In fact, the website plays a unique role at Parkside Church because it does not merely supplement other types of member communication. In many ways, other than the Sunday bulletin, the website is *the* central communication tool for the church. This heightened the need to enlist Silas Partners to not only help the church keep the website fresh, but also to use the website as a strategic communication tool.

Just as a congregation would not be fed spiritually by a Sunday service with the same sermon week after week, nor would Parkside's congregation be served by a website that remained static. The church staff and Silas Partners understood that a one-time redesign of the website was not the end, but just the beginning of a journey to better connect and communicate with the congregation. A first step was to help the church develop a disciplined and consistent approach to keeping the website updated.

After launching the new site, a weekly and a monthly communication calendar were developed to ensure key pages were refreshed in a timely manner. This calendar distinguished responsibilities between the Parkside staff and the Silas Partners team, thus maximizing the level of cooperation between the two teams. The main theme of the site's homepage changes monthly and smaller ads rotate to promote different church activities and ministries.

To ensure the website was not only well maintained, but was also making progress towards the church's larger communication goals, each quarter Silas Partners and Parkside have a strategic planning session. During these sessions goals are reviewed, metrics are reviewed, and a development plan is constructed based on the new initiatives selected.

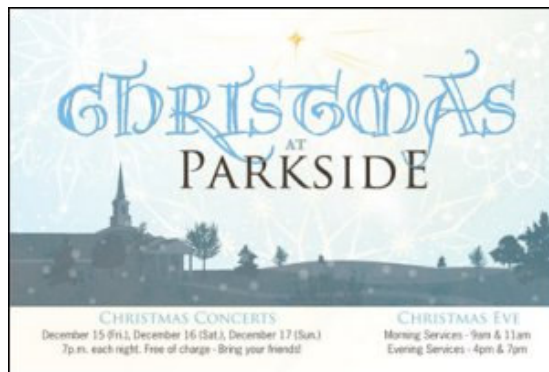


*Postcards promoted the new website*

The church has been proactive in integrating offline communications with online efforts. With the web as the central communication tool for the church, it made sense

to integrate the same brand and messaging into all other print pieces. Thus, print brochures were redesigned to compliment the website. The church has also released newspaper ads, bulletins, and event postcards that matched the website's monthly theme.

Parkside's 2006 Christmas announcements were a good example of strong online and offline integration. Silas Partners designed printed postcards to tie in with the December website theme. The postcards were invitations to Christmas events at the church and were mailed out to the community. That design was also applied to the church bulletins to carry the same theme. Thus, visitors were greeted through their mailboxes, on the website and at the church with the same welcoming "voice."



*Invitations to Christmas services were mailed to the community.*

Parkside also saw the web as a way to reduce staff burdens. Typical book table registrations were migrated to the web. Also, registrations for the annual pastor's conference, the golf classic, Vacation Bible School, and the high school annual ski trip were web enabled. This made accessing these resources easier for the congregation and administering the events easier for church staff.

## The Results

### Landmark Measures

The metrics of success for Parkside's Web Ministry are ones that illustrate whether or not the site's goals of clearly communicating with the congregation and acting as an avenue for community-building are being met.

Within the first two months after the launch of the new website, there was a 230% increase in visits (from about 25,000-30,000 views to an average of 84,000). The successful launch was tied to the staff's commitment to promote this new communication tool to the congregation through bulletin inserts, postcards and announcements from the pulpit.

The popularity of the new website was not short-lived, but has continued since the launch. Months later, the site is still being used heavily by the congregation. The most popular pages of the site are ones centered on



communication and community. The top five pages of the month usually include the calendar, announcement page, videos of the church services, pages highlighting members of Parkside, or any event that receives homepage promotion.

The website is reaching far beyond the church's physical walls. At the end of 2006, the church was averaging more than 12,000 unique visitors to the site per month. This is an astounding number for a 2,000-member church! Also, the videotaped Sunday sermons that the Parkside team diligently posts immediately after the service receive an average of 10,500 views per month.

Beyond numbers, Parkside Church greatly values the ability to receive feedback from site visitors, instantaneous posting of important announcements (including inclement

weather!), and the ability to provide church members with updates regarding ministry opportunities and events. The positive feedback from the congregation has reinforced the value that the website brings to the church.

Instead of being intimidated by the ever-changing Internet, Parkside saw its potential in furthering the message of Parkside Church. By teaming up with Silas Partners, the church has wisely harnessed the website's power as an economical communication platform that supports its mission to "see unbelieving people become committed followers of Jesus Christ."

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### **About Silas Partners**

As online communication professionals, we believe the Internet is central to an organization's communication strategy and to the overall mission of an organization, because it is one of the most effective ways to build relationships with constituents. We aren't one employee trying to do it all, but an entire team of world class strategists, designers, software developers, production specialists, and project managers.

Our mission is to serve Christian ministries by helping them to better fulfill their missions through improving their communication and expanding their reach. Visit us at: [www.silaspartners.com](http://www.silaspartners.com)