The Union Missionary Baptist Church Web Site

Purpose:
The main purpose of this site is to make an online presence and convey information about the ministries and activities of the church. Before the creation of this site, Union had a website, however, it was not as functional and as nice as the one that I have replaced it with. Since the church is the oldest African American Baptist Church in Lansing and has over 1500 members, it was necessary to build a website to make sure people had access to what was going on at the church at all times. So the website not only bridges the gap between parishioners at the church but also with the Greater Lansing community as many functions are held in the Family Life Center of the Church. Today, the internet is probably the best tool to attract people to our church. I have a multimedia portion on this site, which help us reach those members who may be sick or shut-in; not only does our own members use this part of the site, but many pastors from around the country are interested in my Pastor’s sermons and outlines, so they are provided in as audio and the outlines as PDF files for viewing and printing. Having an online presence may also attract prospective members: those who are in the city of Lansing already and are un-churched, as well as those people who may be relocating to the city of Lansing.

I have also added a feature which translate the website into different languages, because our church’s goal is to have a multilingual congregation. We have some members who are from Africa and other parts of the world. By going in this direction, the site is useful to a wide variety of people. If a person drove by the church and wants to know more about the church, they can find information on the website. Someone who is looking for a new church and wants to see what it is likes can obtain a feel of what it is like without actually attending by viewing some images. Current members can read about the current events, the history, hear songs and sermons as well as email and call church staff for counseling or questions. A section on the site has a map where one to put their information in it to get complete driving directions to the church from anywhere in the United States and Canada. The overall design of the site is meant to make each area user friendly to the widest variety of users.

The image that I am trying to portray are done with taste, I think and I have tried to show the best possible images of the persons who are leaders at the church as well as crisp images of the Family Life Center – which is on all of the pages of the website. Keep in mind, this in not the actual church, but it’s only the first phase of the church. I will continue to add on to the website until the entire Worship Center is built. Some of the Baptist Churches in the city of Lansing are very formal and strict, while this is not the case with Union. Although the images of the people look very dressy and classy, which they are, they are quite friendly. Our Pastor believes in being friendly to all people and we are considered a hugging church. It may hard to show images of this effect, but it is reflected in the words on the website and by the activities provided.
**Audience:**

There are three target audiences: current members, past members, and guests:

*Current members* will use the site to find out about current and upcoming events, listen to archived sermons, as well as current ones. They can likewise listen to archived songs from the different choirs. New viewers of the site will probably go to the other sections, such as the history, articles of faith, section about our pastor as well as see what ministries does the church offer. The main part of the site that members will visit often will be the announcement section as well as the sermon outline section. These two sections have the most content and are updated every week.

*Past members* may use the site to keep up to date on what’s going on at the church and around the community. Also, if they have not been attending in some time, they can see what has happened since they left on the history page and as the second phase of the construction begins, they can see what the new Worship Center will look like.

*Guests* may include people who are looking for a new church, people looking for information about the church (such as a historian), or someone who is just “surfing” and stumbles upon the site. Users that are looking for a new church can see pictures of the Family Life Center so they know what it looks like. There are several other candid shots of people at the church doing various things. Later another section will be added specifically for youth and young people. Video clips will be added to show how the youth are involved in a national puppet ministry. If the guests are interested in the Union, the website includes contact information as well as phone numbers and email addresses to get in contact with the church staff. Some of the guests include pastors from churches in the city of Lansing as well as across the country. They tend to view the Sermon Outline section as well as listen to Pastor Jones’s audio sermons. He’s known across the country as a great lecturer, teacher, preacher and speaker. Some other guests may also link the church’s website to their pages. I have noticed the Lansing Branch of the NAACP has added a link to the website as well as emailed me a congratulations message for doing such a splendid job on the site. So guests are important to getting feedback.

**User Needs**

The entire site is designed to be clean and easy to read. The main navigation is at the top, while there are left navigational links, which people can get to other areas of the site. The text is a standard web font, Veranda, so it will be easy for people to see the information and if folks who are disabled want to view the site, they will be able to do so with ease. I have put most of the alternate texts on all of the pages so screen readers and other disability software can read it. There are some images with texts on them, but I used the alternative texts so that a reader could will know what it is even if one could not see the actual image. I have tried to keep every page as simple as possible. I used the newsletter style and tried to use cascading style sheets to keep everything the same. This format is beneficial to both the user and designer because there is so much information on each page and I did not want it to look sloppy or messy. I think the page loads pretty fast, even on a dial-up modem. The location of this church is in the Center of Lansing, Michigan and most of its members live in the surrounding area. Because of this, the
vast majority of users have pretty good dial-up connections or digital internet connections. As for the designer, simple designs are easier to update and fix (so I think). I am trying to keep the design at a minimal so when I teach others how to help me maintain it, I won’t be going crazy. :) This way, small updates and corrections can be done quickly and often, which helps keep content current for users.

**Competition:**

There is no competition. There are not many churches that have a good website or have one at all, particularly in the Lansing area. So it’s a first and probably a model for others to follow. Since there was only one other site on this church, which I removed from the server, there is not a site that is better equipped other than the one I designed from scratch. I think that other church sites are doing the same thing as what this site is doing: conveying information to people. There are about four websites that I like and I would maybe consider patterning this site after:


These sites are like the one I created, they tend to keep the people informed on what’s going on and try to convey the Good News about the Gospel. They invite users to join them, but do not try to make themselves out to be better than other churches. All of these sites have the same objective in providing information about their churches.

**Content:**

The content of this site has come from a few sources. The website has about 50 pages of information. I put a counter on the homepage to see how many hits I get entering the website. I put a sitemap link on every page, so at anytime people can go straight to whatever site they want without clicking on every page. I have also put at the bottom of the page a Google customized search, where the user can look up specific information on the church’s website only, as well as search the world wide web if they desire to do so. The sermon outlines are obtained in their original doc. (MS Word) format and then converted into PDF (Portable Document Format) before being posted on the site. Likewise, the announcements are obtained in their original format of MS Word and then are converted into HTML. All the historical information was obtained from the old website and as historical events takes place, additions are placed into the history section. Images were taken with a digital camera, they were saved in the original size, then later made smaller and optimized for the best possible look for the web. Most of the information on the pages will remain static. I have put a help page on the site so people can make use of the free versions of the RealOne player, windows media player, and adobe acrobat reader to listen to multimedia and view documents that might be in pdf format. Database/e-commerce will be coming at a later date. All information to be posted will be done though the webmaster, which is me, and I am going to ask them to invest in the program CONTRIBUTE, so someone can add to the site as needed. With CONTRIBUTE, I can authorize certain people to make very small updates, without messing up my website. As for obtaining all the above information, much of it is obtained by me through the pastor and church staff. I have officially launched this website in April and I will use user input to change and update pages as needed.
Technology:
Information Design:

The entire site was designed in Macromedia DreamWeaver 3 and MX. Images and photographs were formatted, edited, and optimized using Adobe Photoshop 5.5 and 6.0. By using this combination of software, the two programs work together to excel image and graphic manipulation time, allowing pages to be created and updated in a timely manner. The actual pages on the site are created with tables and nesting tables. The entire main navigation is just text that has been linked. This basically helps in keeping the site looking attractive, yet allowing it to load a little bit quicker. Most of the formatting is done using Cascading Style Sheets and I made each page into a template, so things could be changed very quickly. By designing this way, site-wide changes in color, backgrounds, headers, and fonts can be implemented easily and quickly. The one downside to this Netscape does not allow the multimedia functions to work properly. I am not sure, but I cannot figure out a way to put the media files on the site so that Internet Explorer and Netscape both will work correctly when listening to the sermons and songs. I have looked at the website on old browsers and it seems to work very nicely on them. To help aid in faster loading pages, I did not use special plug-ins like Flash. While Flash would create slightly more interactive pages, the load time outweighed the added interactivity. The pages are to convey information, not make a person go crazy by looking at images and things moving all around the screen.

Server Storage:

The site is stored on a server space bought through APLUS.net – it’s www.abac.com. I have over 500 MB Storage, Unlimited Transfer, and 50 eMail Address, plus ECommerce setup for the website. I am pretty sure this satisfies the space requirements to house the website as well as gives me the opportunity to add other smaller linked sites for the youth. This site allows me to create files in various categories such as pdf folder, audio folder, image folder, and much more. I have a CGI Bin already setup, so I can make forms for the website. When all the content is added to the site, I am not sure how much space I will have used, but I do have an additional 1 Gigabyte that I haven’t touched for extra backup that was purchased for the web development project. The finished project’s URL is http://www.unionmbc.com