

# Searching for Jesus

The Church can Help Thousands of Seekers with One Simple Strategy



It is estimated that half the world's population is online. That means that we are currently able to reach tens of thousands of people worldwide with the gospel! A PEW and American Life study, which surveyed 2,796 Americans, found that 76% have internet access and that 58% turn to the internet when they have problems.

In just one month, the question "Who is Jesus?" was searched over 1,500,000 times. These searches reveal our human condition of longing for God. If people are turning to the internet for theological answers, then pastors have a fantastic opportunity to meet people where they are at-online!

With billions of people "googling Jesus," we, the Church, can point the way if we share theological answers online. Distributing such information can be done in many ways so your content appears in their search results. Video streaming, photo sharing, and blogging are ways to provide answers to those desperately in need. Today I want to talk about blogging and how information gets from your social media platforms into the search engines.

Search engines use an algorithm to deliver content to those seeking information, and blogging (writing a website article.) is one simple but effective way to reach the masses. However, it is crucial to understand the role of the algorithm (search engine ranking.) to be successful. Every time someone Googles for information such as "*who is Jesus*", it gets ranked based on how much engagement their topic is receiving.

However, just writing a blog or streaming your worship service won't boost search algorithms and distribute your content abroad. It may reach a few people, but getting your message out takes one more simple step- posting it to social media.

Invite people to get involved on your social media by asking open-ended questions in your

Livestream and posts. When others are sharing and commenting on your social media, the algorithm thrives on this type of engagement and, in turn, shares it with even more people! How about that? Google can help us evangelize!!! At Pendleton Center UMC, a parishioner wrote a testimonial blog about a Lenten fish fry that reached than 13,000 people! Think of it- more than 13,000 people are reading about God when we share a blog testimony! Below is the blog is written by parishioner, and CLM Sandy Houck

### Feeding The Multitudes



*"The Lenten Season at Pendleton Center United Methodist Church is truly a joyous one. People come from far across several towns for our fish fries. Every Friday during Lent, our church fellowship hall is transformed into a dining room for hundreds of people.*

*During one recent fish fry, far in a back room, the sound of laughter rose above the clamor. This area is known as the "pie room." The sweet smell of homemade pies filled the air as the veteran ladies meticulously sliced up the pies and*

*ensured that each piece was presented perfectly on the plate. In addition to fruit, pies were cream pies, our famous tollhouse pies, and creamy rice pudding. I poked my head in to say hello to the ladies and got so caught up in the joy and laughter of this time-honored tradition that I forgot that I almost did not make it there that evening.*



*It had been a long exhausting day at work. I changed out of my work clothes, rubbed my tired feet, and stretched out on the sofa for a relaxing evening at home. Then suddenly, I remembered I had to go to the Church to check on donation supplies for feeding the homeless the next day. I let out a sigh, dreading the thought of giving up a much-needed quiet evening at home, and headed out the door.*

*Upon arriving at the Church, I began accounting for what was needed to feed seventy homeless people. Would there be enough to feed everybody who came for a meal? I wondered.*

*Finally, I would sit down and enjoy a meal for myself. I was seated with the nicest people who told me about their church missions, and I shared ours, praising our youth programs. As I told them about our Easter Celebration and Egg Hunt coming up, I took a bite of golden fried haddock. Oh, so good!*

*"Hope you will come to our Good Friday service - come for the fish fry, stay for service," I said between bites.*

*Before grabbing my supplies, I bounced around, chatting and fellowshiping with friends and listening to their concerns. Then, seeing my arms full, youth leader Mr. Adrian kindly assisted me with taking the donations to my car. Hot Chocolate with God & S' mores, some of our children's fellowship groups, were having a picnic that evening and offered their extra hot dogs and rolls for our homeless ministry. Our Angel Wings, another children's fellowship group, had made hygiene kits for the homeless. I knew it was no coincidence that everything needed was falling into place.*

*The meal for the homeless continued to grow. What began with just spaghetti & meatballs multiplied again later when Boy Scout Troop 98 contributed frozen homemade sauce from their "Italian Night" fundraiser. Then came another surprise - extra rolls and lettuce.*

*All God's hands and feet are at work, from fish to hot dog rolls. My heart was filled with joy as God provided for his people through a community that truly cares. He is always faithful and perfect in His timing. Just as Jesus fed the 5,000 with only a few fish and loaves, so He does today, using people who are willing to share. I am so blessed to be a part of Pendleton Center United Methodist Church.*

*The following day, I thought, the sun is shining, and it'll be another adventure - another day given and provided for by God! I am so glad I went out that night after work, or I would have missed out on an amazing blessing."*

Sandy's story is simple yet powerful in sharing how God moved in her homeless ministry. In addition, it also promoted the fish fry and brought awareness to the outreach program. The



results are threefold when people connect with a story rather than asking them to come to an event. They will want to attend the event simply because the blog inspired them!

*Why does Sandy's blog inspire us?* Because she explains *Why* she does what she does, Sandy loves serving God's people. A blog that says, "come to our fish fry, great food, and fellowship," may help you get the word out but will not necessarily draw people closer to God. Ask *Why* do we, the Church, have fellowship meals?" and then share the answer in a narrative blog. Raising funds is not a *Why*. It is a *result* of the event.

Getting started with blogging is not difficult. You will need a website and at least one social platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. If you do not have a website, you can still post an article to Facebook and share it.

Write about what makes your Church passionate. Inform your congregation that you are looking for personal testimonies. Share stories in your blog and newsletter as a way to connect with those who are not online.

If you don't have time to blog, you can use an excerpt of your sermon or have parishioners share about how God is working in their lives. In Mark 5:19, Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." In Mark 5:20, we see that the man did go and proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

When God moves in our lives, not only does Jesus ask us to share, but we want to tell others what He did for us. Blogging is an opportunity to share the joy of Jesus Christ with others who will also be amazed that God still moves today.

You can recruit help from people in your congregation who like writing, editing, proofreading, illustrating, and taking photos. Hobbyists invest a great deal of time and money into learning their craft. Most never see a return on their investment because they do it purely for self-expression. When I began my blogging team, photography enthusiasts, artists, and writers were thrilled at a chance to use their gifts to serve the Church! Retired teachers also have skills they might love to use to help on the blogging team. There is no better way to get people to volunteer than ask them to use giftedness to further the kingdom!

Jesus was a master storyteller. He used stories to hold people's attention and elicit emotions in a way that precepts do not. If you want to provide answers to the billions of hurting people who are googling, then craft the message for an impact that appeals to emotion and not just information. Philosophers have known for centuries that if we want to influence, we have to, as Aristotle put it, not only give facts based on logic but appeal to one's sentiment. It will then naturally follow for audiences to connect with you and your Church because you have touched them emotionally. Start by telling them *Why*.





Digital discipleship is about the Church getting to know and connect with people, coming alongside them, and helping them grow. Inspirational stories are a way to meet people who are googling for answers to their troubles. An additional bonus of blogging is that it also helps people find your Church. If you make *engaging* posts to social media, the algorithm will boost your Church's search engine through Likes,

comments, and Livestream chat. If your posts do not have any engagement, then they will not go very far. Once people have become engaged in your social media platforms, the potential reach is unlimited! You can always pay Google to appear in search engines, but rank happens organically as well. Like the feeding of the multitudes, when you begin sharing, it will be multiplied!

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Lori's mission is to assist by teaching and supporting pastors with online and social media strategies to help churches grow their reach.

She is also a writer and contributing author of the best-selling "Chicken Soup for The Soul" series and Facebook Minister for a large church ministry at Pendleton Center UMC. In addition, her work has been featured on numerous media outlets promoting digital discipleship, emotional and spiritual wellbeing

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