

Evaluating Websites

Is that “Catholic” website Catholic?

There are some wonderful resources available online, but it can be difficult to determine if a website is “really” Catholic, or if it has reliable information on it. Often times you’ll need to explore a number of aspects of the website to determine if it’s reliable and who’s behind it. Here are some tips to keep in mind when going online:

Look for a name or organization

- Look to see if there’s a part of the website that says who created it and their credentials. This could be in an “About Us” section or under “Our Mission.”
- Be sure to distinguish between the Webmaster (the person who created and maintains the website) from any authors or contributors.
- If there is information available, look to see if the person has any formal connections with the Catholic Church. In other words, are they accountable to anyone? Is there anyone you could contact to verify the content or the author’s reliability? Do the creators have any educational credentials that would make them particularly able to discuss certain topics? Does their mission point to a bias that might change how they present information?

Check the website’s address (URL)

- Start by looking at the URL (the website’s address, that usually begins <http://>) to see who hosts the site.
- Is this website someone’s personal homepage, or is it connected to a reliable source? It’s not always easy to tell the difference.
- Is it a generic server? For example, anyone can use a service like Yahoo Geocities for free to create their own website, but the URL will start with “www.geocities.com/”. On the other hand, the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website does not use a free domain service, and its URL is www.usccb.org.
- Websites that are connected with dioceses, archdiocese, recognized religious orders, accredited educational institutions, or peer-reviewed scholarly journals are much more reliable than personal sites.

Search the domain name

- Sometimes the information about who created a website is not available on the site itself.
- You can search who created a site using a domain search tool like www.whois.net or www.alexa.com, to try and find a name or organization associated with the site.
- Then search the web for information on the organization or person listed.

Compare and ask!!

- Don't just take the "word" of one site.
- Compare the information to other websites, print resources, cited sources, etc. Is the information consistent?
- Does the website use timely, up to date information?
- When you've searched as much as you can, go to your local parish and ask if they know anything about the site.