

Website serves as entryway

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seems to play well.

Every faith representative contacted said essentially the same thing: The Internet is a valuable communications and outreach tool, but it can never replace a gathering of human worshippers coming together in prayer.

"I really don't see what there is on a website to worship," pointed out Karen Grimm, executive director of the Jewish Temple Har Zion on Bayview Avenue.

She described the synagogue's website (harziontemple.org) as an information device, helping members find out when services take place and providing an information bulletin.

"It's nothing to do with the worship part, it's strictly to do with the PR part," she said, adding part of Jewish worship includes attendance at synagogue.

Unionville's Central United Church was fortunate to snag the domain name unitedchurch.com. It's an attractive site providing surfers with details about church events, Christian development programs, recent sermons and links to national and regional United Church sites.

"It serves as an entryway to familiarize people with us, to inform the public about who we are and what we do without having to be here," said Rev. Ralph Garbe, adding people from India and Saudi Arabia have browsed the site.

"We can and do communicate by Internet, but it really doesn't replace that face-to-face communication, feeling each others' presence."

The benefits of a website are clear, even for the smallest churches.

The Faith Fellowship Baptist Church in Aurora has about 20 members who meet in a local seniors centre because they don't have a permanent space. Their website, www.faith-baptist-aurora.org, is invaluable in keeping members up to date, said its pastor.

The Catholic Church broadcasts Sunday Mass on CTV and weekly services on Vision TV. Toronto Archdiocese spokesperson Suzanne Scorsone said there's little difference between those broadcasts and a webcast.

"It's another form of broadcasting and there just doesn't seem to be the demand for it," she said, adding the Archdiocese website, archtoronto.org, contains not only a list of parishes and directions to those parishes, but links to the Vatican, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and many Catholic charities.

"But we couldn't have something online to replace confession, for example. It has to be personal, it can't be by phone or by TV and it has to be private," she added.

The Jaffari Islamic Centre's website, www.jaffari.org, is detailed and provides an abundance of information for Muslims across the GTA.

"We find it's a hugely powerful communications tool and it plays a role in three ways," Mr. Mohamed explained. "It keeps community members informed about activities and events and our two dozen subcommittees. It also helps our members keep track of friends or relatives in East Africa and those relatives are interested in what's going on here, as well."

But most importantly, it's a way to inform the larger community about what's going on in the world, our views on events. We were the first community in the GTA, maybe in Canada, to issue a press release on Sept. 11 and we did it through the website," he said.

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