In our modern digital world, pastors and congregations have more things than ever to consider when facing a pastoral transition. With a little planning, websites, emails, data storage, and other digital platforms can be maintained with integrity through the change of clergy leadership.

**Websites**
Websites are the new digital front door for a congregation. Unfortunately, they are often ignored during a transition. Sometimes this leads to extended periods of neglect and lack of updated information. Worse, sometimes access to the site gets lost, and we find ourselves hunting for usernames and passwords.

*Here is what should happen:*

**Departing Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:**
Compile all information regarding access to the website. Even if this is handled by staff or a volunteer, this is a good time to secure this information. Information should include:

- Website address
- Website host name and contact information
- Website host administrator login credentials
- Domain host name and contact information (if different from website host)
- Domain host administrator login credentials
- Name(s) and contact information for anyone authorized to edit, manage, or update the website.

*In some situations, the pastor may not need to have administrator access. However, the pastor and SPRC should take this time to be sure that this information is known and in the hands of the appropriate church officer.*

**Incoming Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:**
This is a good time to review your church’s website to ensure that all information is up to date.

*Here is what should happen:*

- Create a plan and timeline to update the pastor’s information to reflect the incoming pastor.
- Submit your church’s website for a “Church Website Review” at www.riotexas.org/websites.

**Email**
It is impossible to cover every possible email scenario. Many churches leave the pastor's email up to the pastor. Some pastors use Gmail or Yahoo accounts. Others use their riotx.org clergy email account. Some churches have their own domain on an Exchange Server, Office 365 account, or Google for Non-Profits account. The Media Center is available to help navigate these multiple situations. Given all the variables, here are some best practices to consider:
• The departing pastor should consider discontinuing the use of the email account used for church business. An autoresponder should be placed on the account notifying senders of the change and offering contact information for the church and forwarding information for the pastor.

• The incoming pastor should not be expected to use the email address of the departing pastor. This leads to confusion and too much extra work for the incoming pastor.

• Churches with Exchange Servers, Office 365 accounts, or Google for Non-Profits accounts should assist the outgoing pastor with closing down their account and enabling an auto-responder.

• Churches with Exchange Servers, Office 365 accounts, or Google for Non-Profits accounts should set up a new account for the incoming pastor before she or he arrives.

• Churches with Exchange Servers, Office 365 accounts, or Google for Non-Profits accounts should ensure that the administrator user name and password are on file with the appropriate church officer.

• This time of transition is an excellent opportunity to consider moving to a free Google for Non-Profits account which will allow your pastor, staff, and leadership to have consistent, secure email addresses tied to your own domain.

Databases/Church Management Systems
Many churches now use electronic databases to track membership, attendance, and other aspects of congregational life. Some of these systems are simple Excel spreadsheets while other churches use more complex programs like Shelby or Fellowship One. Maintaining the security and integrity of these databases is essential. A pastoral transition is a good time to ensure this information is accessible to the appropriate people.

Here is what should happen:

Departing Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

Compile all information regarding the church management system. Even if this is handled by staff or a volunteer, this is a good time to secure this information. Information should include:

✓ Name of software or platform
✓ Company contact and support contact for software or platform
✓ Administrator* login credentials
✓ Name(s) and contact information for anyone authorized to access database.

*In some situations, the pastor may not need to have administrator access. However, the pastor and SPRC should take this time to be sure that this information is known and in the hands of the appropriate church officer.
Social Media
Most congregations now have some level of social media presence. During this time of transition, it is important to secure access to all social media accounts. Social Media platforms regularly used by churches may include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Flickr, YouTube, and others.

Here is what should happen:

Departing Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

 Compile all information regarding all church social media accounts. Even if this is handled by staff or a volunteer, this is a good time to secure this information. Information should include:

 ✓ A list of all active and inactive social media accounts.
 ✓ User names and passwords for all church social media accounts.
 ✓ Name(s) and contact Information for anyone authorized to edit, manage, or update social media account.

A special note about Facebook: Facebook Pages and Groups do not have their own login information. Instead they are linked to one or more Facebook users. Departing Pastors/Staff Parish Relations Committees should determine who has access to these pages and groups and assist in ensuring uninterrupted access.

Incoming Pastor and Pastor Parish Relations Committee:

This is a good time to review your church’s social media accounts to ensure they are being updated.

Here is what should happen:

 ✓ Create a plan and timeline to announce the new pastor via social media.
 ✓ Plan your own social media audit to ensure that your social media accounts are being used appropriately and effectively.

Other Things to Consider
This is not a comprehensive list of all digital platforms and services used in our churches. The same basic auditing procedures can be applied to nearly any digital tool. Some other tools used in our churches include:

• Bulk email services like Constant Contact or MailChimp
• Subscription stock photography sites like Shutterstock
• Subscription based software like Adobe or Microsoft
• Text-messaging services EZ-Texting or Flocknote
• Audio or Video hosting websites such as Sermon Cloud or Vimeo
• Live Steaming services like churchstreaming.tv or uStream
• Online giving platforms like Vanco, PayPal, Kindred or Tithely

Comings and goings in a digital age can be a complex affair. Some upfront work and planning can save hours of frustration later. At the Rio Texas Media Center, we are ready to help. If you have questions or concerns, contact us at media@riotexas.org.