

# **The Care and Feeding of Your Parish Domain (aka Don't Lose Your Website!)**

For most organizations, there are two costs associated with the ongoing maintenance of a website. The cost of server space (often referred to as hosting), and the cost to register your domain name (which must be renewed; usually annually). Your domain name is the actual web address for your site (for example: stpaulsanywhere.org)

For parishes that have websites through the WNY diocesan hosting program, your hosting costs are covered by the diocese, which buys server space in bulk, and allocates it to the various parish sites. The only cost to your parish is the cost for your domain. Domains have different costs based on popularity and traffic, but in general, the cost for a .org domain registration (which is appropriate for churches and non-profit organizations) is roughly \$20 per year.

When your site was created, someone from your parish was asked to register your church's domain name. There are many different website registrars that allow you to do this – GoDaddy and NameCheap are some of the more popular choices (and are generally what the diocese recommends), but they are not the only ones. If you are not sure who your parish's domain registrar is, contact the Diocesan Office, and we can look up this information for you.

Whenever a domain is purchased or renewed, there is usually the option to keep it registered for only one year at a time, or to register for multiple years at once, for a small savings. So your renewal date may come every year, or less frequently. If you are unsure when your domain will next come up for renewal, you may contact the Diocesan Office for assistance in determining it.

In general, it is a good idea if more than one person within your congregation has the login info for your parish's domain registry account, so that there's a backup in case one person falls ill, moves away, or simply forgets the info.

## **Renewing Your Domain**

Domain renewal notices will only ever come by email, and they will come to the same email address that is registered to your account with the registrar (usually this is the address that was used when the domain was purchased, but if your email address changes, or you have a personnel change, you can update the email address on your registrar account, and the new address will receive renewal messages.

Many registrars offer the option to auto-renew your domain, to lessen the chance that you could lose it. This is a useful tool, but even when auto-renew is enabled, you must still keep an eye on your domain registration to make sure that your payment method is up to date, and that the payment is successful.

Regardless of whether your domain is set to auto-renew or not, you should receive an email from your registrar at least 30 days in advance of the renewal date. This is the perfect time to check that the payment method you have on file is still valid. If you're on auto-renew, you should be all set at this point, and can keep an eye out for the confirmation that your card has been charged. If you are NOT on auto-renew, you should log into your domain registrar account and pay the invoice for your domain registration. Again, you should receive a confirmation email when this is complete.

**Avoid Scams!!** – There are some less than scrupulous companies who function as “online yellow pages” (though are far less useful than Google), who send out solicitations for their services by postal mail. These solicitations are often for several hundred dollars, and worded to make you believe that you might be renewing your domain, when this is not actually the case. Their names change, but in the past these solicitations have come from: “Domain Listings”, “Web Listings, Inc”, and “Internet Networx”, and often (though not exclusively) originate in Duluth, GA, or Las Vegas, NV. If you are unsure about the legitimacy of any notice you receive, either by email or postal mail, please contact the Diocesan Office for assistance.

### **We Forgot to Renew Our Domain! What Now?**

Failing to renew a domain before it expires has various costs and consequences, depending on how much time has elapsed since it expired. In general, there is a grace period (anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks) in which you can still renew your domain, so it is important that you contact your registrar **AS SOON AS YOU REALIZE YOU'VE MISSED YOUR RENEWAL DATE**, to avoid losing your domain. Depending on how much time has elapsed since the missed renewal date, there may be additional redemption fees imposed.

At the end of the grace period, your domain will be put out for auction by the registrar. At this time, anyone may purchase it, and use it for any purpose they like, potentially exposing people who thought they were coming to your church website to content over which you have no control. If this happens, your only recourse is to purchase a brand-new domain, which will change the address of your website (and you will need to let your members and your wider community know the new address).

While each registrar has differing policies for their grace period, redemption availability, and fee structure, they are required to disclose them. Here is that information for the 2 largest registrars:

GoDaddy: <https://www.godaddy.com/help/what-happens-when-my-domain-expires-609>

NameCheap: <https://www.namecheap.com/support/knowledgebase/article.aspx/10064/2207/what-happens-to-my-domain-name-after-it-expires>

If you are registered with a different company, you should be able to find this information on their site. If you are not sure, contact the Diocesan Office for assistance.

**The most important thing you can do to avoid losing your domain is to make sure the email address on your account with your registrar is up to date, and check it frequently.**