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Style Analysis — First Lutheran Church Website Text

Evangelism Committee Meeting

<https://flcpittsburgh.org/>

Website Audience and Purpose

This website is meant to be a resource about our church to those in our community, especially (though not limited to) newcomers who are curious about us and who we are, and who are considering visiting and getting to know us. We would like to get to know them as well; therefore, a main rhetorical goal of this website is to encourage them to do so, and we can do this by clearly conveying information about our past, our present, and our mission, which will help them decide if we are a good congregational fit for them.

Text Analysis

In the following pages, I provide a page-by-page overview of my opinions on the text language as it currently exists on the website. I have mostly restricted my focus to tightening and improving this language for clarity and understanding, rather than suggesting information that could be cut or added (except in some occasions where I did overstep my focus to do that; I believe I have mostly called out these instances when they happen).

Where I have felt it appropriate, I have provided suggested revisions for certain phrasings, along with justifications as to why. These are all subjective, of course, and everything in this document is meant to inspire discussion and reflection, rather than be an authoritative command.

Overall, I found the language in the site to be generally very good and clear, with most of these suggestions being simple tightenings of phrasings. This could come off as nitpicky in a few places, but I consider that a good thing—nitpicks are better than egregious problems, of which I don't think there were any.

Home Page

Joining Our Parish

As we noted in our last meeting, we were unclear on what the word “join” is supposed to mean here, since it could mean

- 1) joining us in person for worship (“visiting”)

or

2) joining our congregation (“becoming a member”).

The additional text includes the sentence “Membership in First Lutheran Church is open to all who...”, which suggests the second understanding, but the link underneath it (which also says “join”) directs to the YouTube page and not the membership page of the website, which was confusion because it seems more in line with the first understanding.

We must resolve this misunderstanding by choosing one of these possibilities and keeping that consistent. If we must, we can stop using the word “join” entirely here, due to its ambiguity, and choose more a clearer word choice, such as “visit” or “becoming a member,” depending on which use we wish to convey.

The choice may be done in a group discussion, but my two cents is to opt for the first understanding (“visiting”). We had talked about making too strong a first impression and how we wish to avoid that, so having one of the first pieces of text that visitors to the website see be an appeal for membership may be something that we want to steer clear from. If they’re interested in membership, they will navigate through the site to find the membership page (which we could make easier to find, though the website structure itself is currently beyond me and therefore is not in the scope of this report). In contrast, first-time visitors are likely to want to become acquainted with us, our space, and our culture first before they make any commitments such as membership.

News & Publications

“View Sunday Bulletins, newsletters, and more” [link]

No issues here; too short for analysis. We may want to elaborate, but I’ll leave that for a discussion.

Sunday Worship: 8:30 & 11 am / Weekday Worship: Wednesdays 12:10–12:30 am

No issues.

Just a consideration—

Currently: “Noonday worship is available on Wednesday...”

Possibly: “We offer noonday worship services on Wednesday...” or “You are welcome to join us for noonday worship on Wednesday...”

This language involves people (“we” or “you” and “us”) instead of an abstract “noonday worship,” and this could make it more clear that we are extending an invitation to website visitors.

And a clarification: Is Holy Communion offered at these noonday Wednesday services? If it is, that is not clear here like it is in the text describing the Sunday services. People may be interested in that, so we should consider making it clear if it is or isn't.

Welcome

No issues.

About

Our Mission Statement

No issues.

How We Came to Be

I personally find the phrase “how we came to be” to be a bit clunky and awkward because it is wordy compared to similar alternatives such as “Our Origins” or something similar. It’s not a pressing concern, though.

No concerns on the style of the text’s language here.

I do invite us to discuss: What are the rhetorical aims of having a paragraph about previous pastors here on this page, which is likely one of the first pages that a visitor will come to? In no way to I want to diminish the legacy of these men, who were certainly very influential to American Lutheran history and are particularly important the history of our own parish— but consider also the perspective of a visitor with no background in or knowledge of American Lutheran history. These names mean a great deal to us, but may mean nothing to the visitor. We do have a link to a more detailed “History” page where they can learn more if they are interested, but I want to invite us to think about how our origins as the first English-speaking Lutheran Church west of the Alleghenies impact and influence our life here today. In other words, how are our origins relevant to our mission?

While admittedly a bit beyond the scope of this investigation, I do recommend a re-write of the material here to tie it more obviously to the mission statement on the same page. I suggest keeping the part about Father Heyer’s contributions as the founding pastor, but while the others are important, they can be discussed in greater detail in the “History” page. We can then use that space to connect this past with our present and our mission.

(Incidentally, this is another basis for my recommendation to change the title of this section from “How We Came to Be” to “Our Origins”— the first is broader and can cover material from our entire almost-200 year history, which we can save for the “History” page,

while “Our Origins” is more focused around the 1830s and 1840s and the congregation’s founding.)

Art and Architecture (Virtual Tour)

“First Lutheran Church is of special artistic interest...”

To whom? (This is not a pressing concern, but to me at least, the wording begs the question.)

“...with echoes of and *illusions* to each other...”

“Illusions” here should be “allusions.”

“These pieces, however function not just as separate works but are parts of a whole fabric of intentional design, with echoes of and illusions [sic] to each other that in their interaction give a remarkable unity and force to the individual works and to the building which houses them.”

This sentence is almost 50 words long, so we can break it up to make it easier to traverse. Linguistically, I also recommend placing the adverb “however” at the beginning of the sentence so that it doesn’t interrupt between the subject and its verb. Grammatically, English allows us to place that word here, but it’s a bit easier to keep the subject and the verb as close together as possible.

We could then make: “However, these pieces function not just as separate works, but they are parts of a whole fabric of intentional design, with echoes of and allusions to each other [OR: as they echo and allude to each other]. Their interactions give a remarkableunity and force to the individual works and to the building which houses them.”

This section emphasizes how each of the parts which will be discussed make up the whole that is the building which houses First English Evangelical Lutheran Church, but across this virtual tour, they are all segregated to separate pages. There may be some discussion in these pages as to how these pieces relate to each other in design and in location, but ultimately it’s hard to visualise how these pieces sit in relation to each other in the building, especially for visitors who may have never been in the physical space before. Just where exactly is everything? Is there a way to make the building’s layout more clear?

Baptistry

“Parish leader B. Frank Weyman, the donor of the memorial, greatly admired Dr. Krauth. A wealthy local businessman...”

The preceding sentence is about Dr. Krauth, before it switches here to introduce Mr. Weyman. That sentence ends with another mention of Dr. Krauth, before the next goes back to Mr. Weyman.

We can switch the order of the first sentence so that less jumping happens: “Dr. Krauth was greatly admired by the donor of the memorial, parish leader B. Frank Weyman. Mr. Weyman was a wealthy local businessman with a thriving tobacco establishment in downtown Pittsburgh, and he enjoyed traveling to Europe.”

I continued to revise this second sentence to turn the introductory clause into a sentence in its own right, as it was a bit long.

“The font was to be executed in white...”

This is fine, but is “executed” the verb we want to use? Perhaps, “created,” “sculpted,” or even “made”?

“Executed” is repeated several times over the course of the rest of the page, so we should be aware of that if we want to change the word.

An optional consideration— Something I would be interested to know is: this description makes clear the font’s former place at the front of the chancel and its importance to our liturgy, but by today it has been moved out of the central area and to the side. Are there certain reasons for it being placed where it currently is? When did it move?

Candelabra

No issues or questions.

Columbarium

The page is titled for the columbarium, but the first sentence starts with “The oratory...”. The page will go on to describe the connection between the oratory and the columbarium, but until then, it’s a bit jarring.

I would also explain what a columbarium is for those who have never encountered one or even the word before.

The Cross

Small changes to the first sentence:

(original) “The cross hanging in the South Narthex, is designed by Virgil Cantini of Pittsburgh in 1975 and constructed of enamel inlays, tells of life out of death, emphasized by the interweaving of thorns and lilies.” → (revised) “The cross hanging in the South Narthex was designed by Virgil Cantini of Pittsburgh in 1975 and was constructed of enamel inlays. It tells of life out of death, emphasized by the interweaving of thorns and lilies.”

Is it possible to get another photo on the page? With the current one, it is difficult to see the details which are described in the text.

Free-Standing Altar

No issues or questions.

Good Shepherd Window

No issues or questions. Some small stylistic quibbles but nothing pressing.

Lectern

No issues or questions.

Rather short, though.

Mosaic

“When the present building was but six years old, a period of extensive renovation and improvement was begun.”

This sentence is awkward to me, particularly due to the long and abstract subject (“a period of extensive renovation and improvement”).

Possible revision: “Six years after the present building was constructed, it underwent a period of extensive renovation and improvement.”

“...in certain other churches by seven hanging read lamps.”

Should “read lamps” instead be “red lamps”?

Tabernacle

“Traditionally, [the tabernacle is] a focus of devotion in the church...”

Is this text quoted from something? There are no footnotes or sources listed, and no quotation marks, which makes these brackets stand out.

It’s my understanding that tabernacles aren’t common in Lutheran churches outside of southwestern Pennsylvania— would addressing why we have one be an interesting idea to address here?

History

How We Came to Be

This is currently the same text that is on the other page, but I think it works better here. There’s always room for elaboration, if we should wish to do that, to tie this past information more to our current day (why is this information important/interesting to people who don’t know us yet?).

No style issues. I still think the title is a bit awkward but that may also just be personal preference.

Significant Dates

As has been noted, 1837 and 1840 are repeated in the timeline.

No style issues.

Staff

No issues or questions.

Joining Our Parish

If we wanted the “Join us” scroll on the home page to have the second meaning, it should direct here instead.

I think this is a valuable page to have; even if our main audience with the website is newcomers, others such as acquaintances, friends, and even current members can get some use of it. At the very least, it’s something for newcomers to keep in the back of their minds, especially if they do visit and enjoy their experience.

Small/Inconsequential suggestion: “Infant baptism is practiced,” (original) → “We practice infant baptism.” (suggested revision)

Switch from passive voice to active voice to “own” this practice: we do this, it is not some abstract “thing” that just happens, but we incorporate baptisms into our liturgy not uncommonly.

“Adult baptism is the means through which unbaptized people of cognitive age enter the Church.” (original) → “Unbaptized people of cognitive age enter the Church through adult baptism.” (suggested revision)

Another instance of switching the subject of the sentence from an abstract idea (“adult baptism”) to a more concrete character (“unbaptized people of cognitive age”).

“Cognitive age” could be a jargon/unfamiliar term— define it somewhere

We could do the same for the “Affirmation of Baptism — Youth” section, but I won’t be so picky, especially since the text moves well from the first sentence to the second.

None of these are issues, however.

Opportunities to Serve

No issues.

Volunteer Resources

Original: “Volunteers who are not required to obtain the FBI certification because they are applying for an unpaid position and have been a continuous resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 years must swear or affirm in writing that they are not disqualified from service based upon a conviction of an offense under §6344.”

Suggested revision: “Volunteers are not required to obtain the FBI certification if they are applying for an unpaid position and have been a continuous resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 years, though they must swear or affirm in writing that they are not disqualified from service based upon a conviction of an offense under §6344.”

The original subject was long enough to be its own sentence, so I made it one.

Stewardship

No issues.

Automatic Giving

No issues.

Gifts and Bequests

No issues.

Worship & Music

Worship

“Access to the Lord’s table...”

As we discussed together, this wording is awkward and clinical. We can replace it with the simpler “The Eucharist” or “Holy Communion” to make “The Eucharist/Holy Communion is by invitation of the Lord himself.”

I have no problem with this order of the wording because we want the sentence’s emphasis to be on the Eucharist, which it currently is.

Music Ministry

No issues.

Organ

No issues.

Organ History

“The congregation of First Church...”

This is redundant; First Church is a congregation, and the congregation is the church. I would reword so that it just says either “The congregation has worshiped with several instruments...” or “First Church has worshiped with several instruments...”

There’s something about the phrasing “...worshiped with several instruments...” that’s not sitting right with me, but I can’t put my finger on why. Perhaps replace “instruments” with “organs,” because this paragraph and section deal specifically with the organs over the parish’s history?

Education

The sidebar listing the age groups includes both “Children and **Youth**” and “**Youth** Ministry.”

“...and the teaching of religious language...” (original) → “...and religious language instruction...” (suggested revision)

This revision is ever so slightly more concise and removes a gerund (“teaching” as a noun; gerunds can be initially mistaken for verbs, and they can make a sentence’s structure more wordy than it otherwise can be).

Suggested revision for the whole sentence: “Our preschool and kindergarten class engages in spiritual formation through Godly Play, which is based on the Montessori approach to education to tell biblical stories and to teach religious language.”

Now, the end of the sentence emphasizes what occurs in Godly Play, rather than the approach to education it uses. While that certainly is important, I’d say that what the class learns is more important.

Content question: What do the elementary students use Spark to learn about, more specifically? I have never heard of Spark before, and if I pretend to be a parent thinking about raising my kid in the faith, I would like to know more about it before I start sending them to Sunday school here.

“Children and youth are invited to participate...They are also encouraged to participate...”

Similar to what I’ve said above, if we change this to the active “We invite children and youth to participate... We also encourage them to participate...”, then the invitation and encouragement is much more explicit. One of the functions of the passive voice is to hide the “do-er” of a sentence; but we’re the “do-er” here, and we don’t want to hide that!

Upcoming Events

Content suggestion: “Particular suggestions for adult education are welcome and can be submitted to the Director of Christian Education.” I believe it would be appropriate to put some

contact information here, or at least a name to find and reach out to, to make it easier for people who have ideas to get those ideas out. Though I am aware we don't currently have a Director of Christian Education, so naturally this can wait until after that process is finished.

Social Ministry

No issues.

Campus Ministry

No issues.