



HIGHLY FAVORED
DIGITAL

The Google Business Profile Checklist

FOR CHURCHES & NONPROFITS

Help the people looking for you find your front door

(formerly Google My Business)

INSIDE

Who's searching for a church, and what they need to see

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START HERE

Your front door is on Google now

Think about who searches *"church near me"* or *"food pantry Savannah."* A family that just moved to town. A parent looking for a kids' ministry. Someone who hasn't been inside a church in years and is nervous about walking in. Someone who needs help this week. Before any of them visit, call, or give, they look you up on Google.

What they see is your **Google Business Profile**: your photos, your reviews, your address, and whether you look open. It's free, and for most churches and nonprofits it's the first impression. Most were set up years ago by a volunteer and never touched again.

How Google decides who shows up

Google says local results come down to three things. Churches and nonprofits are ranked the same way businesses are.

RELEVANCE	DISTANCE	PROMINENCE
How well your profile matches the search. This comes from your categories, description, and how complete your profile is.	How close you are to the person searching. You can't move the building, which is why the other two matter.	How well-known and trusted you are. This comes from reviews, photos, links, and mentions of you around your community.
You control it.	Mostly fixed.	You build it over time.

Google's rules that trip up churches and ministries

Hours	Google's guidelines say places with varied schedules, "including showtimes, worship services, or classes," shouldn't list those schedules as hours. Your hours should be when the building or office is actually open to the public. Service times go in your description, posts, and website.
Name	Use your real name exactly as it appears on your sign and website. No slogans, service times, or "best church in town."
Ministries	Google allows public-facing departments that operate as distinct entities to have their own profile, with a different name, category, and hours. A preschool, food pantry, or thrift store may qualify. Small groups and classes don't.
Reviews	Google's content policy treats reviews from owners and staff as a conflict of interest, and doesn't allow incentives for reviews. Your pastors and staff shouldn't review your own church.

WHAT CHANGED IN 2025-2026

Google retired the Q&A section on business profiles in late 2025. Now when someone asks "What should I wear?" or "Do you have a kids' ministry?", Google's AI answers using your profile, your reviews, and your website. If your website doesn't answer those questions, the AI will guess. A real "Plan Your Visit" page matters more than ever.

In Whitespark's 2026 survey of local SEO experts, being open when someone searches ranked #5 among local ranking factors, and review recency ranked #11. That's expert opinion, not official Google data.



THE CHECKLIST

Check off what you already have

Open your profile next to this sheet and go line by line. Only check a box if the answer is a clear **yes**. "Kind of" counts as no.

1. Ownership & Setup

Get these right first. This is where most church profiles go wrong.

- ☐ The profile is claimed and verified, and it's owned by a church or organization account, not a former volunteer's personal Gmail.
- ☐ At least **two trusted people** have owner or manager access, so a staff change never locks you out.
- ☐ Your name matches your real name exactly as it appears on your sign and website, with no slogans or extra keywords.
- ☐ Your **primary category is the most specific one available**, such as "Baptist church" instead of just "Church," or "Food bank" instead of just "Non-profit organization."
- ☐ Secondary categories are added only if they truly describe what you are.
- ☐ The address is the building where people actually gather (no PO box), and the map pin sits on the entrance visitors should use.
- ☐ There are no duplicate profiles under an old name, a former pastor's name, or a previous location.

2. Hours, Contact & Details

What a first-time visitor needs to know before they come.

- ☐ Your regular hours are when the building or office is **actually open to the public**, including Sunday morning if your doors are open.
- ☐ Individual services, classes, and meetings aren't entered as hours. Service times are in your description, posts, and website instead.
- ☐ Special hours are set ahead of time for Christmas Eve, Easter, Thanksgiving, and weather closures.
- ☐ The phone number is the church or office line, and it's answered or has a voicemail with service times.
- ☐ Your website link goes to a "Plan Your Visit" or "I'm New" page. (For nonprofits: the page that explains how to get help, volunteer, or give.)
- ☐ Your description uses most of the 750 characters: who you are, what a first visit is like, your ministries or programs, and the area you serve.
- ☐ All relevant attributes are turned on, especially accessibility features like a wheelchair-accessible entrance, parking, and restrooms.

3. Ministries & Programs

Help Google, and the people searching, understand everything you offer.

- ☐ Your services or offerings are listed wherever your category allows, such as worship services, kids' ministry, youth, groups, recovery, or a food pantry.



- ☐ Public-facing ministries that operate as distinct entities, like a preschool, counseling center, or thrift store, have their own profile with a distinct name, category, and hours.
- ☐ Each campus has its own profile, with its own phone number if possible and a matching campus page on your website.
- ☐ If you livestream, your description says so, and your website makes it easy to watch online.
- ☐ Giving and volunteering are easy to find from the page your profile links to.

4. Photos & Video

Visitors want to picture Sunday morning before they come.

- ☐ Your logo and cover photo are uploaded. The cover is your best exterior shot showing the front entrance.
- ☐ Photos show **where to go**: parking, the main entrance, the welcome area, and kids' check-in.
- ☐ Real photos of worship, greeters, and fellowship. No stock photos.
- ☐ Children are never shown in a way that identifies them without a parent's permission.
- ☐ At least one short video, like a 30-second welcome from the pastor or a walk from the parking lot to a seat.
- ☐ New photos are added every month from services, events, and outreach.

5. Reviews

Reviews are how a nervous first-time visitor decides you're safe to try.

- ☐ You have a direct review link and QR code, and it shows up in the bulletin, the slides, and your welcome emails.
- ☐ You ask members, visitors, volunteers, and the people you serve, **not just the ones you know are happy**.
- ☐ Pastors and staff don't review their own church. Google treats it as a conflict of interest.
- ☐ Reviews are never tied to a gift, drawing, or raffle.
- ☐ Every review gets a warm, personal reply within a few days.
- ☐ Negative reviews get a gracious reply that invites a private conversation, and replies never reveal pastoral care, counseling, or anyone's personal situation.
- ☐ New reviews come in every month, not just once a year. Big moments like baptisms, VBS, or an outreach day are natural times to ask.

6. Posts & Events

Posts won't jump your ranking by themselves. They show people you're alive and welcoming.

- ☐ At least **one post per week**: a sermon series, an event, an outreach recap, or a volunteer need.



- ☐ Christmas Eve, Easter, VBS, and fall events are posted as **Events 3-4 weeks ahead**, with the date, time, and a button.
- ☐ The first line of every post gets to the point, like "Christmas Eve services: 4 PM and 6 PM."
- ☐ Every post has a real photo and a button, such as Learn More, Call, or Sign Up.

7. Beyond the Profile

Google checks your profile against the rest of the internet.

- ☐ Your name, address, and phone are identical everywhere: your website, Facebook, Apple Maps, Bing, and your denomination or association directory.
- ☐ Your website has a "Plan Your Visit" page that answers service times, what to wear, how long service lasts, kids, parking, and accessibility.
- ☐ You show up locally online through community partners, local news, the chamber, event calendars, and your denomination's church finder.
- ☐ Someone checks the profile every month for edits made by the public, and for Performance data like calls, direction requests, and website clicks.

YOUR SCORE	_____ / 40
35-40	You're easy to find and easy to trust. Keep it up through every season.
25-34	A good start, but people looking for you are finding someone else first. Start with sections 1, 2, and 5.
0-24	People are searching and not finding you. This is the fastest place to fix that.

BONUS FOR 501(c)(3)s: GOOGLE AD GRANTS

It's separate from your profile, but it pairs well with it. Through Google for Nonprofits, eligible 501(c)(3) organizations, including churches, can receive up to \$10,000 a month in Google Search ads. You apply through Google for Nonprofits, and the account has ongoing rules to follow, like keeping a 5% click-through rate and tracking conversions. Check the current terms at [google.com/nonprofits](https://www.google.com/nonprofits) before applying.



KEEPING IT UP

A rhythm built around the church calendar

Your calendar already gives you plenty to post about. Here's a routine a staff member or volunteer can run in about 30 minutes a week.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO
Every week	Publish 1 post with a real photo and a button. Reply to every new review. Add 1-2 photos from Sunday or the week's events.
Every month	Check Performance data for calls, direction requests, and website clicks, and compare to last month. Count new reviews. Aim for steady, not spiky. Look for edits someone else made to your profile.
6 weeks before Christmas and Easter	Set special hours for every service day. Publish Event posts for each service. Refresh your cover photo and "Plan Your Visit" page. Ask your congregation for reviews the Sunday before.
Every quarter and after staff changes	Re-run this full checklist. Remove access for anyone who has left, and make sure two current people are owners or managers. Compare your profile to the top 3 churches or organizations showing in your area.

Post ideas that actually work

New sermon series	"New series starts Sunday: Rooted. 9 and 11 AM. Everyone welcome."
Christmas or Easter	Post each service as an Event with the date, time, and what to expect for kids.
Outreach recap	"120 families served at Saturday's food drive. Thank you, volunteers!" Add a photo, with permission.
Volunteer need	"We need 6 greeters for Christmas Eve. Here's how to sign up."
First time here?	"What to expect on your first Sunday: where to park, what to wear, and where the kids go."

WANT A SECOND SET OF EYES?

Highly Favored Digital builds websites, online giving, and local visibility for churches and ministries across Georgia and South Carolina. We'll compare your profile to the top 3 in your area and show you exactly what visitors see before they walk in. Book a free 30-minute call.

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Sources: Google Business Profile Help, "Guidelines for representing your business on Google"; Google Maps user-contributed content policy; Whitespark, 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors; Google for Nonprofits and Google Ad Grants program terms. Reflects the platform as of September 2026. Google changes features and program rules often.