

Communications 101

Communication is everything we do, say, or show. We are constantly communicating, whether we mean to or not. As Christians and United Methodists, we need to understand how important communication is to our goal of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

On this site you will find helpful ways of communicating with your congregations and with the people in your communities that need to hear the message of Jesus. You will also find information on how the South Carolina Conference is able to help equip you to further your communication goals. We can help you to deliver your message by creating media and marketing plans to fit your needs. If you ever need any assistance with your communication, please call Matt Brodie at 888-678-6272 ext 265.

How communication works.

Communication is a very simple process that involves three steps. The first step is a sender sending a message. This could be anything from a simple conversation to a complex multimedia presentation. Then the message is decoded by a receiver. Simply put the receiver of the message listens and comprehends the information. Finally the process is reversed. The receiver becomes the new sender and gives feedback to the original sender. It's important that to know that feedback doesn't have to be an evaluation of the message a simple response letting the sender know the message was received can be all that is needed.

An example of how communications works could be like this: You make announcements of your special Christmas programs in your bulletins and from the pulpet. The Congregation hears reads and hears your announcements. You know your communications have worked, because they show up.

Communications Plan Outline

I. Situation

- A. Clear statement of the church's vision/mission
- B. Clear statement of the purpose of the communications strategy to meet the vision/mission and people's needs
- C. Relevant research findings

II. Objectives A. What do we want to accomplish?

III. Communications

- A. Who is the target Audience
- B. What message do we want to convey

C. What forms of media will best communicate the message to the intended audiences?

IV. Implementation

A. Who is going to do each task?

B. What is the timetable for these actions?

C. Who is responsible for monitoring or coordinating the effort?

D. What could go wrong, and how will we respond if it does?

V. Budget

A. What will the effort cost: in finances, in time, in volunteers?

VI. Evaluation

A. How will we assess what we did?

VII. Where will we go from here?

Web Ministry

It's important to look at websites as a ministry, not as just a webpage. A church's webpage can provide critical communications to congregations as well as those who may be looking for a church. The website could provide other media such as pastors' sermons for those who can not attend services. It can be used to maintain contact while mission teams are away, or used to provide general information about the church and its people.

When a website is used correctly it becomes its own ministry. It has the ability to reach around the block or around the world. When a website is used incorrectly nor not updated on a regular basis it becomes nothing more than outdated information.

Search Engine Optimization

The other very important part of having a website is making sure people can actually find it. Google, Yahoo, and other major search engines rank websites on how useful they feel they are to the internet community. These rankings are what determine how high on the search results you are. There are several factors that go into this, but the major three are your website's Meta data, updates, and links. Meta data are special tags within the website that help search engines know what your website is about. The more your site is updated, the more search engines will crawl your website for information. The more they go to your site, the more important it becomes. Lastly and maybe more importantly are the links. Search engines like to see that you link to websites and other websites link to you. Every time a website links to you it another time the search engines visit your page. The more the better.

We've created some code to copy and paste into your websites to help. It's a link list of most of our Methodist Churches and agencies. Once most of our churches are link to each other, you site will start to appear higher on the search results.

[To copy and paste the code click here.](#)

Print - It's not going away so use it!

We are all familiar with print media, whether we recognize it or not. While nearly everyone identifies it with a press – newspapers, books or magazines – the medium also includes newsletters, brochures and church bulletins. Although the downfall of the printed word has been predicted since the inception of radio and television, it has continued to exist because it is relatively easy, inexpensive, far-reaching and an adaptable medium.

Your church bulletin and/or newsletter is the easiest, most cost-efficient way to reach every member of your congregation. And chances are, one is already in existence. In addition, printed materials, be they brochures or simple postcards, can be an important tool in reaching out to those seeking a church home.

Newsletter/Newspaper As Effective Church Communications

- Builds Community
- Includes people
- Unifies the conference
- Creates understanding
- Underscores connection
- Extends Ministry
- Allows and encourages participation
- Informs people of what they are a part
- Helps people discover their own ministries
- Invites people to be a part of the overall ministry
- Public relations tool in the community

Mission Statement

The mission statement is the measure and motivator of the newsletter or conference newspaper's purpose. Does a story, artwork or photograph help fulfill the mission? If not, do not include it.

Sample mission statement: United Methodist Connection is published six times each year by the Annual Conference to inform, engage and inspire conference and church leaders and members about the persons, issues, events, mission, program and actions of the conference, local churches, congregations and pastors, and to share life-saving health information.

The mission statement identifies the audience (conference and church leaders and members), the “what” of every article (about the persons, issues, events, mission, program, actions, and life-saving health information), and the “who” of every article (conference, local churches, congregations and pastors).

Audience Identify: Who is the audience? What do they want and need? What do they have to offer to the content of the newsletter?

Frequency A popular option: Monthly

Size And Length: Popular sizes: 8-1/2 x 14 or 11 x 17, both folded in half
Planning Content for Your Newsletter

Purpose and Audience are your first guides

Year Calendar - Plan promotional or informational series

Lead Article

Sections

Appropriate Graphics

Tie-in with other communications efforts

(Ask people what they read and don't read, what they would like that isn't there)

Types of Articles

News

Feature

Promotional

Inspirational

Standing:

Calendar

Staff

Masthead

Contact information

Writing Style

Objective

Active

Brief

People

Quotes

Uses journalism basics

Art

Photographs

Original Art

Clip Art

Purpose—Have a reason for what you use Placement—Don't make it difficult to read around

Selection—Make sure moods of the art are consistent throughout

Headlines

Every article needs a headline which includes a subject and a verb ("to be" verbs may be implied)

Use the words "to" or "will" in a headline to indicate something in the future (UMW to meet Nov. 1, UMW will meet Nov. 1)

Use present tense to indicate something which has happened (Youth raise \$2000, Church awards scholarships, Twins born to Smiths)

Design

Have a distinctive banner

Design or use a template – layout should be consistent from page to page and from issue to issue. Same rule applies to content.

Select a font for the text, one for pull quotes, and one or two for headlines.

Do not crowd text on a page. White space, where there is not text or art, helps make a page more readable.

Select strong, simple graphics or clear photos and use sparingly.

Newsletter Guidelines

Effective Church Communications

Builds Community Includes people Unifies the congregation Creates understanding

Underscores connection Public relations tool within the congregation

Extends Ministry Allows and encourages participation Informs folk of what they are a part
Helps folk discover their own ministries Invites people to be a part of the overall ministry
Public relations tool in the community

Purpose of the Newsletter

Vital to Define Determines content Stewardship of time, money and energy Place in total
communications ministry of the church

Possible Purposes Promotion Information Education Inspiration

Who Defines Community effort Editor Communications Committee or Administrative Board
Pastor Congregation

A Written Purpose Statement Will Be Very Helpful!

Defining the Target Audience

Congregational audiences (Primary)

Think, as specifically as possible, of all the different groups in your congregation with whom
you want to communicate. Define them in terms of depth and length of involvement in the
congregation, age, involvement in special ministries, leadership roles, life situations giving
rise to special ministry needs, so forth.

Other audiences Guests News media Other churches in the community Community leaders
Schools.

Planning for Your Newsletter

Planning Content Purpose and Audience are your first guides Year Calendar Plan
promotional or informational series Issue Folders (Paper or Electronic) What must be
included What should be included What might be included Lead Article Sections Appropriate
Graphics Tie-in with other communications efforts Ask people what they read and don't read,
what they would like that isn't there

Planning Model Take your calendar for the period the next newsletter will cover and promote
Identify as many of the events and activities as you can What would be the lead story in your
issue What secondary articles What other information would be good to include How will
you make this invitational and inspirational as well as informational

Content

Types of Articles News Feature Promotional Inspirational Standing Calendar Staff Masthead
Contact information

Gathering Information Folders Newsletter Tip Sheet Staff Correspondents

Writing Style Newsletter Objective Active Brief People Quotes

Journalism basics 5 W's and an H Inverted Pyramid Style Leads and hooks Avoid "religionese" or "churchese" Explain acronyms News Stories Features /Inspirational Articles Editorials (Try not to put the pastor's column on the front page) Letters to the Editor

Headlines Every article needs a headline which includes a subject and a verb ("to be" verbs may be implied) Use the words "to" or "will" in a headline to indicate something in the future (UMW to meet Nov. 1, UMW will meet Nov. 1) Use present tense to indicate something which has happened (Youth raise \$2000, Church awards scholarships, Twins born to Smiths)

Layout and Design

Importance of Layout Invites and intrigues the reader Map as to where articles are Time saver for the reader Says this is important

Type Faces and Sizes Serif for body type (This is an example of serif type—notice the little "feet" on the letters) Sans serif for headlines (This is an example of sans serif type) Minimal bold, italic and underline—remember to use bold and italic for emphasis, no reason to use underlines when italic is available for titles. Avoid all capitals—these are difficult to read and give the impression that someone is shouting at the reader Readability is the most important factor. Avoid Old English and script types. They are nearly impossible to read—and may give a feeling that the church is "old-fashioned" rather than traditional. No smaller than 10 point type—11 point is probably better, depends on the style Boxes Can be used to set articles off Try to avoid having more than one, at most two on a page Have a reason for having a box—just to have one on the page is not reason enough

Sections/Grouping Articles Help the reader by putting articles about groups or ministries together. For example, you might have a graphic, which identifies the Youth Ministry Page—and then have several articles each with their own headline.

"Front Page" Make this as "newsy" a page as possible. Try to have a news article—not the pastor's column here. People will go inside the newsletter to read column. The article you want people to read, if they read nothing else in the newsletter, should go here. Try to have more than one article—otherwise this can look very "gray."

"Address Page/Back Page" This will actually be the first page most people see in your newsletter. Don't waste it with filler or "throw away" material. Put some important information here. Some churches find this is a good place to put the calendar (weekly newsletters) or a table of contents highlighting what is inside.

Columns/Line Length 3-4" wide No less than 30-35 characters

Paper Color—white or cream is best, light pastels are acceptable. Avoid Christmas red or green. They are pretty—but nearly impossible to read when printed with black ink! Weight—Heavy enough that ink will not bleed through and that the newsletter will hold up through the mail. Light enough to allow neat folding. Stock—Does not have to be expensive but should

be of decent quality that says this is important for you to look at. Art or graphics that will be reproduced will make some determination on how heavy your paper needs to be.

Ink Black is best; blue or brown with lots of black in them are usually okay. Design Elements Name Plate/Banner Essential to plan Keep it consistent Distinctive Logo/Tie in with Other Print Pieces Name of the Church Street Address Telephone Number E-Mail Address Web Site Theme Masthead Name of publication Frequency and deadlines Editor's name and contact information Address Other Standing Features Staff Box Statistical Box Calendar Section Identifiers Borders Margins Justification

Art Photographs Original Art Clip Art Purpose—Have a reason for what you use Placement—Don't make it difficult to read around Selection—Make sure moods of the art are consistent throughout

“White Space” Don't feel you have to fill up every iota of space on your newsletter page. “Planned white space”—margins, space around headlines, type large enough to be easily readable with sufficient space between the lines—lets the reader mentally breathe and believe that your newsletter is a manageable piece of communication.

Evaluation of Your Newsletter

Production and distribution of a church newsletter represent a substantial investment of time, energy and money. Periodically you should ask if the newsletter is doing the job that you want it to or if there is a way it can be made more effective—or if there are entirely different or additional ways to communicate that would be more helpful to the congregation.

Questionnaires Periodically ask people through a questionnaire in the newsletter or bulletin what they read and don't read, what they would like to see what is not included, how the newsletter might be more helpful, whether it comes out often enough or too often, so forth “How did you hear about this?” Ask people attending events or programs or being involved in special ministries how they learned about the opportunity

Focus groups Structured conversations which give people an opportunity to talk about the newsletter and give input about specific aspects of it—probably would also want to look at other aspects of local church communications in these

Informal conversation Ask friends, colleagues, other church members what they really think of the newsletter—and emphasize that you want honest answers; criticism is not going to hurt your feelings.

PODCASTING AND DOWNLOADABLE AUDIO.

While many people believe that podcasting means putting audio files on the web for download to either a personal listening device or a computer, it is not. A Podcast is distinguished from other digital audio formats by its ability to be automatically downloaded from an RSS feed that contains an audio file using software (like iTunes). Downloadable audio can be in any audio format such as .mp3, .wav, etc. that is downloaded to a computer by a user. Most people do confuse the two as being the same, but the process for both is very different. Podcast require much more work and special software to make and receive the

podcast, while downloadable audio is simply a matter of having the audio available for download on a website.

For more information on the process of Podcasting [click here](#).

Radio and its role in your marketing plan

Like the other elements in your advertising/marketing strategy, radio can be an effective tool when used properly. But, like other advertising media, it has its pro's and con's.

First, let's look at radio's advantages. The biggest benefit is its ability to reach very specific demographics. Even in small markets there are probably a handful of radio stations, each programming to a different segment of the population. And, most radio markets have at least one religious radio station.

From a production standpoint, radio can be fairly inexpensive. Most radio stations will produce your commercial for free or a nominal charge. That can be both good and bad. The good part is it's free, or close to it. The bad part is that after a while a lot of their commercials begin to sound the same. When you want your message to stand out, that's not a benefit.

Radio is particularly good at promoting specific events or specials. Churches have found that hosting a "remote" broadcast during a festival or other day long event can really pay off.

The other big advantage of radio is its ability to broadcast your church services. Typically, Sunday's are slow advertising revenue days for radio stations. An offer to buy a one-hour block of time at a highly discounted rate will usually be well received, unless other churches are already committed to that time.

Now, for the disadvantages. Radio can be an expensive marketing tool from a cost-per-thousand standpoint. To even begin to register with listeners, a commercial needs to be heard, on average, 3.2 times. That may not seem like a lot until you consider the average consumer's listening habits. Radio is a very portable medium. Think about how people listen to radio in their cars, for example. They may be doing chores and be in and out of the car five times in the space of a few hours. To have that same person actually hear your ads repeatedly, you may have to have your commercial run 20 to 30 times in the span of a few days.

All too often advertisers say, "I've tried radio and it doesn't work." Radio does work if used properly. You've got to commit to an extended run schedule (which allows each listener to hear your ad more than three times), buy the right station for the right message, and produce an ad that effectively gets your story.

When buying radio, don't let your own preferences cloud your decisions. Just because you listen to Station WXYZ doesn't necessarily mean that the kind of people you are trying to reach listen to that same station. First figure out who you want to reach, then find the station or stations that can deliver that specific audience. Then within that audience, station sales representatives can specifically tell you the best time of day to hit, say, females 18 - 34....or males 35-49. And that gets back to the biggest advantage of radio, the ability to target very specific demographics within your marketing area.