

And You Will Be My Witnesses

Acts 1:8

In the gospels, Jesus offers us a model for the Christian life. He goes to temple to worship and teach, heals those who are hurting and feeds those who are hungry. Then in Acts, he encourages his disciples to go into the world to be his witnesses. Using the communication tools of the day, these early Christians went to spread the news to the world. The information superhighway was little more than a bumpy road as Paul and the others devoted their time and resources to carrying the story of Christ's love to other people and places. Today our information highway seems a lot easier to travel, but it still comes with a cost. While we may not be in physical danger like the early apostles, witnessing to Christ and strengthening his church still requires a commitment of our time and resources. We need to traverse the bumpy and sometimes costly road of modern communications so that we may be faithful witnesses to both each other and our community.

As your church prepares to improve its communication strategies, it's important to remember the Biblical basis for this commitment. Communication is part of Christ's call. To do it well requires prayer, discernment, intentional actions and resources. It also requires a willingness to try new things, including those that may seem uncomfortable. Being a faithful witness isn't bragging, it is sharing the good news about Christ with each other and with our communities.

Step 1: Make a Commitment:

The best way of improving communications is committing discernment time, volunteer energy and money to this mission. This may involve:

- Discerning through individual and community prayer how to connect more deeply with those in the church and the community
- Planning communication priorities for the year as part of a session retreat
- Creating and uplifting a committee with a communication vision
- Reflecting on the process quarterly for the first two years to discover what works best for your church, then on an as needed basis after that
- Being sure that the administrative staff has the tools and time to do any tasks that may fall to them
- Contemplate financial support for effective communication.

Step 2: Evaluate Current Practices:

Interpersonal Communication

Rate the church's intentional communication at all points of interpersonal contact. Place a check the boxes for strong current practices, an x in the box if it could be better. If the church does not engage in the practice, leave the box blank.

- Greetings at the door
 - Do the greeters make eye contact
 - Offer a hand to shake
 - Offer words of welcome and introduction (see below)

- Sanctuary chat
 - Do people intentionally talk to those they don't know
 - Do the greeters walk a newcomer into the sanctuary and introduce them to a peer?

- During collection and communion
 - Do the ushers make eye contact?
 - Do the congregants make eye contact or speak as they pass the elements

- After the service
 - Are visitors introduced to others?
 - Are you intentional about getting the relevant information?
 - Are the offered a handshake, eye contact and other personal interactions?
 - Is there a follow up phone call, pastoral visit or letter?

- Preschool, scouts, or other community use drop offs and pick ups:
 - Are church members present?
 - Is there interaction with those who may be at the church at drop off times or does each group keep to itself.

- Between adults and children/youth
 - Do the adults address the children and youth by name and vice versa?
 - Are there cross-family interactions?

- Among children/youth
 - Do the children know each other?
 - Are they taught skills for including others and making visiting children feel welcome?

Community Communication

Communication vehicles

Please check all current practices:

- Personal invitations
- Announcements in church
- Timely email invitations and updates
- Phone calls
- Mailed information
- Community mailings
- Community flyers
- Community advertising

Does YOUR CHURCH have or do the following?

For the church:

- Email addresses for the database
- Use the database for direct email
- Use the database for direct paper mail
- Use the database for phone contact
- Have designated committee members who regularly update the communications team of upcoming events of each committee four weeks in advance
- Publicize events in a variety of ways
- Put photos and articles up on the website within two days of the event
- Regularly solicit ideas and information for the newsletter from church members
- Do the materials reflect *the people* not the institution of the church
 - Do they include as many names and quotes in articles as possible

- Do they include photos in the church newsletter

For the Community

- Create and annually update a database of local publications
- Distribute press releases to media outlets for all special services (Christmas, Easter, a healing service, VBS, etc.) and events three weeks in advance
- Send photos with captions to media outlets *within two days* of the event
- Have a media release permissions for all programs (VBS, after school care, etc.) that take place. It can be on the registration
- Put photos and articles up on the website *within two days* of the event
- Have a bulk mail permit
- Have a community mailing list for new homeowners within 10 or 20 miles of the church
- Have materials that reflect the love of Christ, the *people* of your church and not the *institution* of the church.

Step 3: Brainstorm

Are there communication vehicles or structures that can help you to:

- Grow disciples
- Be a faithful beacon
- Engage people
- Improve giving

Step 4: Plan a strategy

Create a community framework that will facilitate communication in target areas. This may include:

- Creating a committee
- Assigning new duties to existing committees
- Designating or reallocating financial resources
- Training staff or reallocating staff priorities