



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

COMMUNICATIONS

Telling your church's story

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COMMUNICATIONS

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CONTENTS

| |
|---------------------------------------|
| 04/Our Identity, Call, and Mission |
| 07/Job Description |
| 08/Core Communications |
| 09/Introduction |
| 11/Getting Started |
| 13/Making Plans |
| 14/Types of Communication |
| 16/Analyzing Your Audiences |
| 16/Developing the Message |
| 16/Selecting the Right Vehicle |
| 19/Projecting a Positive Image |
| 21/Welcoming Visitors |
| 22/Publicizing the Life of the Church |
| 27/Communicating with Videos |
| 28/Electronic Communication |
| 29/Benevolence Interpretation |
| 31/Resources |

A handbook on external and internal communications for directors of communication, communication chairpersons, and members of the communication committee in United Methodist churches.

Our Identity, Call, and Mission

About now a small voice in the back of your mind may be whispering, “What am I doing here? To what have I said yes? What is my role?” At the same time you may be aware that your congregation has extended to you a *call—a call to serve*. And you have said *yes—yes to leading in a vital mission*.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. You have agreed to serve as a leader bringing your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to the church. When the leaders focus on the church’s purpose—*its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ*—and link that purpose to the passions of the people, amazing things can happen.

The fundamental way we fulfill our mission is to reach out to people in the name of Jesus Christ, to relate people to God, to nurture and strengthen them in their journey of discipleship, and to send them into the world to be the church—inviting and receiving others in the name of Jesus Christ. We call this the primary task of The United Methodist Church. Effective leaders keep the whole of the primary task in their sight, working to keep all of its aspects in concert.

Leaders in the church must be first, and foremost, spiritual leaders who model and embrace Christian discipline and teaching. *By practicing the means of grace—prayer, fasting, studying Scripture, corporate worship, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Christian conversation, and acts of mercy—church leaders stay tuned to the mission of the church and live out the primary task.* Members and would-be members should be able to look to a congregation’s leaders for spiritual example and direction, because true leaders are known by their fruits. People’s lives are changed through their influence.

Leaders use their gifts and talents to enable others to use their gifts and talents to the fullest potential. The flow of information, inspiration, guidance, and vision from leaders is an encouragement to others on their spiritual journey. Leaders help others to see new possibilities. When leaders are focused on the mission of the church, community is built and ministry occurs. The church focused on God is alive with creative energy aimed at transformation.

Four Essential Leadership Functions

Church leaders support and strengthen the church when they pay attention to these leadership functions: (1) help people discover the current

reality in which they live; (2) bring together the congregation's understandings of current reality and desired reality into a shared vision; (3) develop the plans to help the community move from current reality toward the reality of its shared vision; and finally, (4) monitor the whole work of the church as the congregation moves with God's guidance toward its vision.

1. Discovering Current Reality

Accurately describing current reality—the way things are—may be the most important function of leadership. The booklets in this Guideline series offer suggestions for leaders to pay attention to the various committees of the church's ministry. In addition, it is critical for church leaders—lay and clergy—to spend time together discussing the ministry of the whole congregation. The conversation needs to include attentiveness to God's guidance and everything that describes a congregation's "what we are, here and now." Because God is always doing a new thing, this job is continuous. When we pay attention to change, we provide a base of integrity and strength from which to move into the future. Faith in Jesus Christ and a spiritual centering in God offers the strongest foundation to move people fearlessly through the massive changes of the twenty-first century.

2. Naming Shared Vision

Ask the question, "What do you want more than anything else in the world?" and most persons will give a response that indicates that they want to live in a world filled with love, faith, security, and meaning. Because persons desire a positive future, they are willing to invest themselves in organizations that are committed to it. By its very nature, the church is devoted to the creation of a better future. When the church promises to move people personally and corporately toward their desired reality, people will invest time, energy, and resources into the church. As people see their own desires linked to the congregational vision and deeper understanding of God's future, they deepen their commitment and involvement. Building this link is a vital role of leadership.

Naming a shared vision is accomplished by asking people about their lives and their faith, and listening very carefully. By listening, we mean deep listening—the kind that requires setting aside our own agendas and entering into the worldviews of others, and listening for God through the conversation. It is a significant shift in our understanding of leadership in the church to move from telling people what we think they need to know to listening to people in order to find out who they are and what their desired realities are. Effective spiritual leaders listen to the hearts of people and begin to articulate a shared vision.

3. Developing Bridges

To span the gulf between our current reality and the hope expressed in the shared vision, leaders must build a bridge. The third critical function of leadership is to plan actions and develop systems that create the bridge across this gulf. Leaders who are elected to administrative and program committees are responsible for the ongoing work of the church and must pay attention to the present. At the same time, leaders *must* be focused on the future—keeping today and tomorrow in tension—ensuring that the church doesn't get stuck in the past, present, or future.

Church leaders who are attentive to God's leading and who can hold the tension between today and tomorrow are *visionary leaders*. Visionary leaders see it all—current reality, desired reality, and the bridges to get from one to the other.

4. Monitoring the Journey

Perhaps the most critical task for leaders is keeping an eye on the whole of the faith journey of the congregation. When leaders are constantly caught up in “doing” the administrative and program work of the church, there is not any time left for “being” with God in prayer to discern the leading of the Spirit for the congregation. Leaders must step back from “doing” constant activities in order to pay attention to the total direction of the church's mission and ministry. All elected and appointed leaders must spend time together listening to God in prayer, Bible study, conversation, and other means of grace in order to lead the entire community in the work of Christ. Anything less is not Christian spiritual leadership.

Job Description

Director/Coordinator of Communication

(This description is intended only as a guide. Each church's size and situation will determine what is most relevant and realistic.)

PURPOSE: Serve the church and its members by providing comprehensive communication planning. Work with communications volunteers and church staff to develop and execute specific strategies to carry out the vision and mission of the congregation.

RESPONSIBILITIES: In cooperation with the communications committee, the program council, and the staff, develop and implement annually a coordinated plan to communicate the programs and mission of the church both externally and internally.

Direct the activities of the communications committee.

Plan for and consult on the visual identity of the church, including print and electronic materials, and church signage.

Oversee the administration of the church Web site.

Edit and manage the publication of a regular newsletter, overseeing its content, mailing costs, postal requirements, and database management.

Assist program staff with meeting public relations needs and developing and implementing plans for communicating programs and special events.

Develop and follow up on news releases to radio, TV, newspapers, and other publications.

Develop and maintain a good working relationship with members of the local media.

Serve as a member of the crisis management team.

Be a member of the finance campaign committee.

Represent the church in appropriate professional and community groups as requested by the senior pastor, church administrator, and communications committee.

Core Communications

Communications can be as extensive as budget, personnel, and commitment will allow. Since none of those are infinite for churches, here is a suggestion for core communications on which and from which to build:

- Current written vision and mission statement
- Logo
- Identifying statement (slogan) for the church
- Overall eighteen-month communications plan
- Good understanding of who the church is
- Understanding of target audiences
- Benevolence interpretation events and opportunities
- Monthly newsletter (in addition to the weekly bulletin)
- Bulletin boards
- Outdoor signs (including timely banners)
- Visible celebrations and special events
- Seasonal advertising
- Good media relations
- Welcoming training

Where to Go for Help

- Contact your annual conference office. Someone there is designated for communications. In many conferences, this person has the title Conference Director of Communications. Don't hesitate to call this person. He or she has easy access to resources and support, and may be willing to provide training.
- Let your pastor know you want to learn about communications resources and opportunities. Pastors receive a packet of resources from general church agencies and the conference office and can share them with you.
- Subscribe to the conference newspaper or newsletter. Check the conference Web site often for ideas and resources.

Other resources are suggested throughout this booklet; phone numbers you can call for help are found at the end.

Introduction

Congratulations! By accepting the position of communications coordinator, you will help your congregation share Christian life with each other and the community. It's a wonderful job, but one that's filled with challenges. And no matter how you choose to carry out your new mission, chances are, you'll be forever changed by the experience.

During your tenure in the position, think of yourself as the host of a unique gathering, working on effective ways to invite people into the faith community, then making sure that everything about the gathering is inviting, welcoming, and sustaining—from the answering machine message to the condition of the parking lot to features in the newsletter.

Your Role

As church communications coordinator, you will be part of a leadership team that brings to life the vision and mission of the local church.

Communications is a ministry of service, meaning you will interact and partner with many, many people in this job. Your hats may include what is known in the secular world as “marketing,” “advertising,” and “public relations.” You will be the eyes and ears inside and outside the church as you look for ways to effectively interpret each to the other.

Because you are a key communicator, you need to have an understanding of everything that is taking place in the church, its history and culture, its programs and missions, and its hopes and plans for the future. Then you will be able to help the church tell its story of nurture, outreach, and witness, and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

You probably will interact frequently with the church council chair, who is charged with coordinating programs of the church. You may also serve as consultant to other areas of church life. It would be helpful for you to read the other Guidelines in this series to learn more about the jobs of other persons and to better understand their communications needs.

Communications is such an encompassing topic and can go in so many directions that this booklet is meant only to be a starter resource for you—to provide an overview and direction. Not all of the suggestions are applicable to your situation, but the communications concepts are sound. Adapt and apply them as you can.

What Is Communications?

In its broadest sense, *communications* is the sum total of everything we do, say, or show. “I see every blade of grass as an evangelist,” says one pastor of a growing congregation.

Churches are constantly communicating, whether they mean to or not. *Intentionally* communicating the church’s story is the cornerstone of an effective communications ministry.

Effective communication requires **understanding** your audiences, **targeting** your messages, and **employing tools and techniques** that convey the messages to your audiences and that facilitate a desired response. To be effective and intentional requires **research** and **planning**.

Faced with competition for attention and money, church “shopping,” and an increasingly unchurched and skeptical culture, churches must learn to communicate in ways that get people’s attention, touch their needs and desires, and offer solutions that make sense to those persons.

In response, church leaders are beginning to accept and use religious marketing and advertising concepts and electronic visual media as tools to grow congregations and maintain vitality—but not compromise their message and mission.

When John Wesley founded the Methodist movement, he quickly recognized the need to go where the unchurched were and to communicate in their terms so that they might respond. Using the language of the people is again critical for the church in the midst of an unchurched culture.

Getting Started

Quick Start Overview

1. Form a communications committee.
2. Conduct a communications needs assessment.
3. Assess communications tools and resources.
4. Define who this church is and what it does best.
5. Develop a communications plan for the next eighteen months.

Building a Communications Committee

One person alone cannot effectively vision, plan, implement, and evaluate local church communications. Accomplishing these tasks requires teamwork. The strength of a committee is the ability to brainstorm ideas that one person could not think of alone—and to spread the work and needed expertise among several persons.

Depending on the size and location of your congregation, include members on your committee who work or volunteer in areas of communication, such as writers, photographers, and specialists in electronic media or marketing/communications, public relations, and advertising.

If there are no communications professionals in your congregation, recruit individuals in your church who represent the various age groups, who are good “idea persons,” and who enjoy trying new strategies. (See *Leading Small Groups*, Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation 2001–2004 for ideas on working with your committee.)

After assembling your team, the first order of business is to come to a common understanding of local church communications.

ACTION ITEM: Give everyone a copy of this resource to read and discuss. In addition, you may want to invite a communicator from another congregation or from the annual conference office to visit and provide some insights from his or her experiences.

Defining Your Church Communications

Local church communications is a ministry intended to tell the story of the gospel, the local church, and the church at large in order to reach out and bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

ACTION ITEM: Identify the written vision and mission of the church. The vision and mission are the witness of the gospel—the story made real—that communications attempts to share.

An initial step in communications is to know ourselves. What is the “personality” of our church? Who are the people who attend? What is the image of our church among our members? Among our neighbors or community? What are the church’s strengths? What are our ministries? Who would be attracted to our church?

ACTION ITEM: List characteristics of the church to assist you in your communications planning. *Knowing who you are defines how you talk about yourself.* A simple questionnaire and personal interviews can ask how people would describe the church. The answers may be quite different among the groups and indicate people’s perceptions or experiences with the church. Perceptions about the church may not be what the church intends. Share your findings with the leadership team. Consider your communications plans in light of what you discover.

Building Community

Church is all about relationships. Use your tools in every way to build and strengthen those relationships. An important function of communications is building community among members and other persons associated with the church. Remember how rejected you felt when your best friends left you out of the information loop? Effective communication makes people feel valued, significant, cared for, and supported. It gives them connection—a sense of belonging, purpose, and commonality with others.

Reasons Communication Is Important for Members

1. To make informed decisions (about giving, for example).
2. To grow spiritually.
3. To feel connected and valued.
4. To be active in the life of the church (by learning about opportunities).
5. To be uplifted.
6. To help staff and church chairs do their jobs more effectively.

ACTION ITEM: Think of other communications needs of church members relevant to your church’s vision and mission. Examine how all those needs are currently being met through communications. Note areas that may need attention.

Assessing Your Communications Tools

Once you have taken a look at communications needs, it’s a good time to audit the communications tools your church currently uses or may plan to use. This is an effective way for committee members to express their opinions as they continue to consider such questions as: What is currently taking place—both externally and internally? Why are we doing what we’re doing? Are we being successful?

ACTION ITEM: For each tool, identify:

1. Is it currently being used? If so,
2. How is it meeting identified needs?
3. How do you rate its effectiveness?
4. If not in use, is it applicable in the future?

Communications Tools

Internal Audience (church members and others associated with the church)

Announcement flyers/Posters
Benevolence bulletin inserts/leaflets
Bulletin boards (electronic and other)
Church directory
Chat rooms (electronic)
Newsletters
Room directories
Electronic mail
Faxes
Listserv
Multimedia
Worship bulletin

Internal and External Audiences

Brochures
Celebrations
Compact discs
Database management
Displays
Handwritten notes
Layout/design expertise
Letters
Logos
Personal visits
Photography
Radioministry
Satellite system

External Audience (the public)

Advertising
Newspaper, TV, radio, magazines, Yellow Pages
Bumper stickers
Direct mail
Door hangers
Invitational Sundays
News releases
Outdoor signs

Signs
Slogans
Special events
Telephone
Television ministry
Themes
Videos
Web site
Others:

Making Plans

Now that you have developed your identity, know your members' needs, and have identified all your communications pieces, you are ready to make plans for the next eighteen months. That time frame is recommended to allow for careful planning.

ACTION ITEM: With your committee, the pastor, and a large eighteen-month planning calendar, identify important times and events in the church year. Mark those on the calendar. Decide if/what communications will be needed. In addition, look at the communications needs you've identified, including marketing and advertising campaigns. Consider doing an overall communications plan. Then, formulate communication action plans for all projects on the calendar.

A communications plan is like a road map, guiding you from where you are to where you want to be. Taken together, all your communications plans should move your church closer to its mission and vision.

It should be obvious at this point that communications should be a line item in your overall church budget. If it's not, or if the figure is unrealistic, lobby for a change. A program that has value is worth a commitment of time and money.

Outline of a Sample Communications Plan

I. Situation

- A. Clear statement of the church's vision/mission
- B. Clear statement of the purpose of the communication 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?

The rest of this resource will highlight information that will provide support for developing your communications plans.

Types of Communication

Marketing

As a discipline, *marketing* is not a type of communication but rather a process that includes communication. It is the process of effectively communicating information to target audiences with the express purpose of providing information or persuading them to respond a certain way—which

may include changing attitudes and behaviors. Advertising and public relations are two marketing tools.

The church may seek to persuade its active members to grow in their stewardship, or to persuade less active members to participate in a mission project. Or, the church may decide to reach out into the neighborhood to learn what needs exist and how it can respond to those needs, and then, through communication, motivate those persons to participate. This is marketing.

The key to communication marketing is targeting an audience, understanding that audience's needs and communications preferences, knowing your message and what you have to offer, developing those in a way that is aimed at the audience, and employing tools to reach the audience in the most effective way.

Advertising

Advertising is just one part of a communications plan. It can be used to promote participation in events and ministries, and to inform the public about church. Whether it is done on a community-wide basis or within the congregation, the principles remain the same.

While some free advertising is available (radio calendar listings, for example), a congregation cannot depend upon those options for its total advertising program. An advertising campaign should last about two weeks.

All forms of media should work together to communicate your message. You can hire an outside firm to handle your communications if you have the money, or you can rely on volunteers and staff. You can purchase resources that can be personalized for your church, or you can create your own.

Make sure to cross-promote in each of your communications media. Use the website address on all printed material, offer a free copy of your newsletter on your Web site.

The three basic aims of advertising are to INFORM, PERSUADE, and REMIND. Basic principles: Know your audience. Aim your message. Repetition is critical. People must see a newspaper or other print ad at least three times before it has any influence, they must hear a radio ad or see a TV ad six times. To increase repetition, use a mix of media appropriate to your audience's preferences, unify your advertising with the same logo, theme or slogan; use outdoor banners and signs to clinch the on-site recognition. Place print ads where your audience will be looking, perhaps on the entertainment page.

Because advertising is such an important tool, obtain resource ideas listed in the back of this booklet.

Analyzing Your Audiences

Whenever you communicate, your audience has a tremendous influence on *what* to say, *how* to say it, *when* to say it, *where* to say it, and *who* should say it. To communicate effectively, you will want and *need* to identify audiences to target. There are several ways to do this, including by family life-cycle groups (unmarried, newly married, full nest, empty nest), by generation, by lifestyle, and so forth. Each has its own needs, interests, and concerns. Be aware of those, as well as their communication preferences.

Experience indicates that segmenting markets and targeting audiences are more cost-effective and you can aim your communications more directly. Learn all you can about your congregation too (ages, incomes, values, location of homes) because this point applies to internal communications as well.

Developing the Message

The message comes from the purpose of the communication and should be developed for the target audience. Whether for communications evangelism or support for missions, develop the message based on your research.

What is our audience's need? What are their perceived costs? Why would they like the church/ministry? What does the church/ministry have to offer that meets their need? Based on why they would care about what the church/ministry has to offer, what is our main proposition to them ("selling" point)?

Selecting the Right Vehicle

If your communications plan is a road map, what vehicle(s) will you use to get to your destination?

The key to successfully reaching an audience is knowing who they are. For example, do they get their news from CNN, MTV, or the *Wall Street Journal*? Does the word *madonna* evoke images of the Virgin Mary or the Material Girl? The answers to those questions make a difference in your choice of vehicle.

Develop a profile of the person you're trying to reach. This is where your research will be useful. If you don't have a clear picture, seek out people in your target audience, and ask them.

Radio has become a major media presence in each community, and the number of radio stations continues to grow nationwide. It's easy to target an audience with radio because stations shape programming to attract certain types of listeners. They offer specialized formats such as adult contemporary, rock, talk, and so forth. If you know whom you want to reach, you can get excellent exposure on radio, and radio stations have a clear idea of who's listening.

The more often you can air a spot or program, the more effective it will be. Churches have more success on radio and cable TV when they place twenty-six ads in a two-day time span rather than twenty-six ads in a seven-day time span.

Don't be afraid to talk to your radio representatives! If you can, take the station manager out to lunch and discuss programming ideas. Play for him or her the radio public service announcement spots produced by United Methodist Communications. (Get them free by calling 800-476-7766.) For paid advertising, talk to the ad rep. Stations can produce spots for you.

Some good strategies for using radio include:

- broadcasting your worship service;
- participating in call-in programs;
- submitting items for radio news reports;
- running public service announcements (PSAs);
- paying for spot advertising;
- sponsoring programs dealing with moral or ethical issues;
- participating in calendar listings.

Television relies on sound and pictures. It's the medium for movement where images do the communicating. People remember pictures more easily than words. It is now considered the medium of the people, but television can be expensive. *(Note: Before you try to create your own radio or TV spots, check with your conference communications office or with the Public Media Division of United Methodist Communications (UMCom) to see what preproduced spot packages and PSAs are available. You can add your church's own tag line to an existing spot and may save thousands of dollars in production costs.)*

Cable TV and public access channels are other broadcast options. They

reach narrower but more targeted audiences, and their advertising rates are usually far less than those of a commercial station. Whether you are considering broadcast television or cable, talk to the ad reps at the stations.

Both television and radio offer packages. They determine the general times they will air the commercial and give you lots of spots for a significantly reduced cost. The end of summer and the first six weeks of fall are the least expensive times to buy, and each will reach a large audience.

Get to know the stations themselves. Each one has its own personality. Use them to tell your story for free. Talk with the assignment editor or equivalent person. Find out what kinds of stories they're looking for and when. Help them see the unique twist of a story from within your church.

Daily newspapers reach a broad audience, but newspaper readers tend to be older. Ad placement in the paper is critical. People are most likely to notice an ad in the upper-right-hand column on an odd-numbered page toward the front of the paper. Newspaper advertising rates vary significantly from day to day, and many newspapers offer package deals. Always ask for a deal.

In addition to advertising, encourage newspaper coverage of stories. Reporters *are* approachable. An established relationship can be critical in good times—and bad. (See “Maintaining Good Media Relations.”)

Community newspapers are circulated in and focus upon a smaller area. They are generally published weekly, which gives them a longer shelf life than dailies. Their rates are less than daily newspapers, and they tend to be more receptive to stories about churches in the area.

Newspaper church directories are widely read by newcomers to towns and others looking for a different church to attend. However, the pages tend to be cluttered with ads that look much the same.

Billboards can be effective, depending on their location. The more desirable the location, the more expensive. Use no more than seven words of copy with professionally done artwork. Ads must be eye-catching and easily understood from a moving automobile. Talk to billboard company representatives about costs and opportunities.

Direct mail can be sent exactly where you want it to go. Mailings for church events are best when sent six to eight weeks before the event. Connect your direct mail pieces with a unifying theme and distinctive look. The key to success in direct mail advertising is developing a good mailing list and including

a response form with clear instructions for the intended result. Address lists can be purchased from direct mail companies. Call them and discuss options.

Classified display ads in the Yellow Pages reach newcomers to town and others looking for a different church to attend.

Posters, handbills, and door hangers can be placed precisely, but wide distribution requires a lot of legwork.

Bumper stickers and T-shirts, if professionally designed, can provide a traveling advertisement for your church. Keep your message simple, and be aware that both vehicles tend to outlast any advertising campaign.

Bus signs and bus shelter advertisements offer a message to a captive audience. Be clear and be brief with your message. Know your audience!

Projecting a Positive Image

Public Relations

Public relations is a communication tool that seeks to influence attitudes in order to gain support. Church public relations is affected by the way your church handles its reputation and image, based upon its witness. It can involve public service announcements on radio or TV, or gifts to the community, such as helping in crises.

Image management can be slippery because public relations is affected not only by what we do and say, but also by what we *don't* do and say—and even what others say about us. Know what people are saying about the church. Be intentional about promoting good public relations.

Body Language as Public Relations

Congregational communication is not limited to verbal and printed messages. Churches exude a kind of “body language” that may either reinforce or contradict their other messages. Churches that proclaim, “All are welcome!” but ignore visitors are guilty of false advertising at the very least.

Some of the most eloquent messages from your church are unspoken. The church building, the grounds, the sign, and even the church van are on view twenty-four hours a day. All of them send out silent signals—public relations signals. As a key player on the communication team, you have the responsibility to see that everything connected to your church carries out its vision and mission in a positive way.

The old saying, “You have only one chance to make a good first impression,” might have been coined for church communicators. Studies have shown that visitors make up their minds in the **first eleven minutes** whether or not they’re coming back to a church. Visitors usually spend that time finding a parking place, locating the proper entrance, being greeted, and finding a seat. No matter how eloquent the sermon, the opinion of a visitor is often shaped by unspoken messages long before the service begins!

Image Checklist

Ask yourself what image you want to project and how effectively it is being projected:

- Is your church sign in good repair with a clear, timely message?
- Are the grounds as inviting as the sanctuary?
- Is the parking lot easy to navigate with the appropriate lines, arrows, and signs clearly visible?
- Are the entrances well lighted and appropriately marked?
- Are the bulletin board displays timely and interesting?
- Is your sanctuary aesthetically pleasing with comfortable seating?
- Is your church vehicle in good repair with professionally painted lettering that’s legible at a distance?
- Is the phone answered promptly and properly by a cheerful, attentive listener?
- Do your answering machine and voice mail systems invite the caller’s response? Are messages returned promptly?

Body Language Tips

The church sign should be at right angles to the street in front of the building, visible to people driving in both directions. It should be easily seen from the far lane with letters large enough to be read from a moving car.

Banners and **lawn signs** may advertise programs or exclaim a message such as “Building Hope” or “We Have a Place for You” to go along with an advertising or marketing campaign. Change them frequently to show you are a dynamic and active congregation.

The church grounds should reflect cleanliness, order, and harmony. Good landscaping, neatly trimmed grass, and an absence of leaves and litter indicate a high level of pride. Clearly mark buildings and doors so a visitor will know which place to enter.

The **church entrance** should be well lighted and inviting. Mark bathrooms

clearly, and place directional signs leading to the nursery and the church office in the foyer. The sanctuary should be clean, well lighted, and aesthetically pleasing with hymnals in good repair.

A **bulletin board** may be one of the first things a person notices inside the church. Each board should convey a positive image of the church and connect church members to it. It should constantly evolve to reflect the changing dynamics of church life. If it doesn't change, people quit looking at it. If you have a marketing theme, use it on the bulletin board, such as "Join the Journey."

Consider these possibilities for your bulletin boards:

1. Matted photos of new members and staff including their names
2. Matted snapshots of special events and teams
3. Monthly calendar of activities
4. Matted snapshots from outreach projects
5. Posters about denominational projects, special offerings
6. Promotional material about new resources in the library
7. Volunteer opportunities and/or "Volunteer of the Month"
8. Media stories about the church and members of the congregation

Telephones as Public Relations

Telephones provide personal contact and are seen as a reflection of who the church is. A caller will decide in the first few moments of contact whether your faith community is friendly, professional, and reliable. The person answering the phones IS THE CHURCH at that moment.

The **answering machine** may also be the first point of contact with your church, so it is an important element in successful communications.

After hours, the voice on your answering machine should also be cheerful, enthusiastic, and friendly. Especially on weekends, your recorded message needs to include the church address and times of the services, and a number for emergencies, *but little more*. Invite the caller to leave a detailed message, and make sure all calls are returned promptly.

Welcoming Visitors

As prospective new members, visitors are a transfusion into the lifeblood of the church. If your communications evangelism brought the visitors to the church, then they are your invited guests. Greeters should welcome them warmly and introduce themselves, being

mindful of the visitors' special needs. Couples with young children may need directions to the nursery. People with disabilities may need extra assistance from the moment they enter the door.

All visitors should be given the opportunity to fill out an information card and return it before leaving the service. Wearing a visitor's button or standing for recognition may embarrass first-time visitors. But it goes without saying that members of the congregation should spontaneously introduce themselves to visitors and make room in the pew. Ushers could make an effort to seat lone visitors beside a person of similar age.

As national and regional denominational advertising is becoming increasingly effective in bringing people to church, congregations are discovering how important it is to receive training in ways of being intentionally inviting and welcoming.

Assisting Persons with Special Needs

Integral in being welcoming is providing accessibility for those with limiting physical conditions. With an aging population, it's a benefit worth promoting.

- Include the accessibility logo in ads and posters.
- Provide clear directions to accessible entrances.
- Advertise services with interpretation for persons with hearing disabilities.

Publicizing the Life of the Church

News Writing

Nothing beats free publicity, especially when the news is good. Writing a news article or a press release is not difficult once you understand some basic concepts of news style, such as the "inverted pyramid" and the "hook."

The inverted pyramid principle helps order the information in your press release. For space reasons, editors usually cut from the bottom of the story. To keep the essentials of your story intact, put the most important facts at the beginning: who, what, where, when, why, and how. Details of lesser importance should follow. Keep sentences short, use action verbs, and be specific. Limit yourself to no more than two or three sentences per paragraph, and try to avoid beginning two consecutive paragraphs with the same word.

The hook is the attention-grabber of the story, and it should probably be the initial (lead) sentence. Your hook might be a significant date, a prominent name, a unique twist, or the beginning or the completion of a project. For example: “Grace United Methodist Church will celebrate its Golden Anniversary this Sunday with a special service linking past, present, and future.” Or “Governor Mitchell turned heads at Grace United Methodist Church when he dropped by unannounced to attend last Sunday’s service.”

Writing the Release

1. Always use a typewriter or word processor.
2. Type or print your release on official church letterhead containing the address and telephone number. Designate a contact person.
3. Double-space lines, and use only one side of the page.
4. Include a line above the title for the release date, such as: “For Immediate Release” or “For Release June 16.”
5. Center “MORE” (in all caps) at the bottom of page 1 to indicate there’s another page.
6. Put some identifying words at the top of the next page, for example, Grace Church Anniversary, page 2.
7. At the end of the release, center “30” or ###, the traditional printer’s symbol meaning the story is finished.

Church Story Possibilities

- New staff members in key positions
- Notable guests
- Outstanding volunteers
- Declarations on national or international issues
- Responses to disasters
- Unique new programs or approaches
- Community initiatives
- Record-breaking or award-winning projects
- Travel by congregation members involving a special activity
- Participation by staff or members in national or international meetings
- Construction/remodeling, both beginning and completion
- Local angles to national religious stories

Maintaining Good Media Relations

Learn to work effectively with the local media to get your story out. Become acquainted with the religion writer of the daily paper, the news directors at popular radio stations, and the editor of the local weekly newspaper. Take them out to lunch; ask about their families; find out what makes them tick. Discover their

needs, deadlines, and policies; their views on what they consider to be newsworthy; and the kinds of stories they run most often. Ask whether they prefer to receive news releases or story ideas that their own reporters will develop, and whether they prefer to receive messages by e-mail, fax, or postal mail.

Print and broadcast professionals move frequently, so make sure your media contact list is up to date. Be sensitive to their deadlines, and return all phone calls promptly. Be a reliable source of information by making sure everything you send them is accurate. Double-check all dates and the spelling of names, clarify all relationships, and include the titles of people in your story. Unless the governor showed up unexpectedly, don't wear out your welcome with the media by sending mundane stories about the church bake sale or the Wednesday night potluck.

Be prepared to "pitch" your story, tying it to a regional, national, or international event. Thank your media contacts for considering your story, and thank them even more profusely for running it. Save any criticism for major problems. Once you've established a relationship, ask all your media contacts if they would like to be put on your church mailing list to receive the newsletter and other special mailings. Don't send them unless they ask.

Most editors and news directors are interested in stories or story ideas that have one or more of the following elements:

- News from an important source, the higher the profile the better.
- Timeliness, geared to what's happening today.
- Appeal to a large portion of the community.
- Human interest stories of courage, sacrifice, loyalty, and suspense.
- The unusual, an off-beat twist.
- The first, the biggest, the best.
- Conflict and controversy, the clash of ideas or values.
- A story in progress.
- Disaster or tragedy. In the news business, "If it bleeds, it leads."
- News about famous, rich, or influential people.

The Church Newsletter

A good newsletter can be one of the most effective tools for your church or ministry. It's seen by far more people than those who hear the Sunday sermon, and it can be a great vehicle for advancing your church's vision and mission.

Conversely, a poor-quality newsletter can have a negative or embarrassing effect.

Why Publish a Newsletter?

The purpose of the church newsletter should be to **educate**, to **inform**, and

most of all, to **boost and sustain congregational morale**—a key ingredient in community building.

Newsletter stories can include new member profiles, discussion issues, activities, interpretations of numbers and actions. Answer for the reader, “How does this affect me?” or “What does it mean?” In addition, use the newsletter for volunteer and mission recruitment, recognition of outstanding service, ministries highlights, a calendar of activities, and general church news from United Methodist News Service. Conduct readership surveys every eighteen months to find out what people want and don’t want—and how often.

Consider publishing all or parts of the newsletter on a Web site, which may be preferable for some members. It also allows for timely updates.

Who Is Our Audience?

The primary audience is the members of the church. Beyond that, the newsletter can serve as a news source and public relations tool. You may choose to send it to visitors, media representatives, other clergy, district and conference communicators, members in the armed services, missionaries, college students, former members who have moved away, people who have participated in or contributed to the church or its ministry, and medical offices.

How Often Will We Publish and How Will We Distribute?

Weekly distribution is ideal, but it can be both expensive and time consuming. Monthly can be effective, but the information loses some of the timeliness. Biweekly may be a good compromise. Electronic newsletters or Web site “updates” to printed newsletters are growing in popularity. Also, ask your readers what they prefer.

Tips for Making Your Newsletter Appealing to Readers

- Give people what they *want* as well as need.
- Keep in mind the reader who will only glance at the newsletter for thirty seconds.
- Highlight members’ names in bold.
- Use simple, upbeat language. Most newspapers are written on an eighth-grade reading level.
- Avoid using colored stock. White or off-white uncoated paper with black ink works best for most readers.
- Use a consistent nameplate, page format, and type specifications. Twelve point type for body copy is comfortable for most readers. Headlines can be larger and in boldface.

- Set it up in a 2- or 3-column format. The ideal line has seven or eight words, between 40 and 50 characters. The average reader takes in three to four words per eye movement and comprehends best when making two eye movements per line.
- Put the most important story on the top of page one under the nameplate. Discourage the pastor from putting his or her column here.
- Use bullets, boxes, bars, and graphics to grab the reader's attention and break up the flow of copy.
- Keep articles brief; use plenty of quotes and the active voice.
- Remember to include the who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- Avoid jargon.
- Check all details and spelling carefully.
- Recruit others to edit and proofread.

Church Brochures

Your church may produce several brochures. Each brochure must have a particular purpose (such as highlighting one ministry) and carry out that purpose by combining form, design, content, and language.

A basic publicity brochure about the church is especially useful for distribution to new and prospective members. It summarizes the congregation's purposes, ministries, services, and so on. When designing the brochure, think about this question: Why would someone be interested in this church?

Avoid jargon. Assume the reader knows nothing about your program or ministry. Use language the reader understands (remember *audience*). Focus on the human element, and don't be afraid to address the reader as *you*. Draw upon your market research to determine the most effective message and elements. In deciding brochure size, consider how it will be distributed: in an envelope, as a self-mailer, as a handout, or on tabletop or rack displays. Keep the brochure focused and simple.

Ways to Use Church Brochures

Make available in high-traffic areas in the church, mail to neighbors, supply to area Realtors, include in the visitor's packet, supply to local chamber of commerce, send to other ministers, include in a media or press kit, display in area hotels, motels, and transportation terminals.

Unified Print Pieces

Every printed piece your church sends out makes a statement about your ministry. Consider these principles in developing a unifying look for your printed pieces:

- For consistency, choose a single ink color and paper stock for use in letterhead,

envelopes, thank-you notes, business cards, and Web site. There should be enough contrast between the ink and the color of the stock for ease of reading.

- Use a sleek, contemporary typeface; it suggests a forward outlook and more vitality than a traditional style.
- Invest in a professionally designed logo that visually captures the thrust of your ministry, and use it on all signage, business cards, stationery, brochures, and so forth.
- If you include a mission statement or motto, make it succinct.

In designing all communications, ask:

1. What is the purpose of this piece?
2. What is my message?
3. Who is my audience?
4. What needs do readers have?
5. What benefits am I offering them?
6. What elements will convey my message?
7. What do I want the readers to do?

Communicating with Videos

Making messages come alive through video can be an effective approach to telling the church's story. Videos have the advantage of creating images through sight and sound. They can take a person on location. They can create a mood. (*One word of caution:* videos or CDs made for young people need the guidance of a professional or someone who understands the pacing, the pictures, music, and graphics necessary to keep a video interesting for the electronic media generations.)

Before planning to make a video, consider these points:

1. Does the subject matter lend itself to a video format? That is, can the pictures tell the story? Talking heads are not a practical use of your video resources. Video is the medium of action.
2. What is the one main point you want to make?
3. What pictures will make the point?

Suggestion: Use a story format. For example, if your goal is to explain where apportionment dollars are spent, you might focus upon an individual who has benefited from a project made possible by apportionments. When looking for a subject for your video, consider activities that are critical to the life of the church, but may be taken for granted, such as:

- A day in the life of the church
- Oral histories from older members
- Documentation of a recent mission trip
- Where the church's money is being spent
- Volunteers at work

Be mindful of the needs of your audience. Video is effective only if the people in the audience think the message is important. Your goal should be to connect them to your message: reinforce their thinking, inform them, make them feel good about their ministries, and motivate them to want to take action.

Electronic Communication

Electronic communication has changed the way we “do” church—and the way in which people expect to receive communication. The options and changes may strain the church budget and personnel. Yet, a presence on the World Wide Web is accepted as the norm for a growing number of churches. Certain members of congregations expect it.

Church websites can be primarily informational but they also offer evangelistic opportunities to spread the gospel, because non-Christians may look to a local church Web site for spiritual help and support. Here are some ideas:

Avoid Christian jargon—Unchurched people will not understand the language or religious concepts.

Offer answers to problems—Use advice from counselors or health professionals

Include children's and youth pages—Let the young members of your congregation help with designing and deciding upon content.

Evangelistic section—Write for the unchurched. Include basic questions and answers and testimonies from members. Use headlines that would attract readers, such as, “Finding the meaning of life.”

Interaction—Build community by providing chat rooms or bulletin boards from your site.

When considering a Web presence, think about these issues:

1. What will the mission and purpose of the site be initially (sharing news and information, ministry, introducing the church, chat, database)?
2. Who are the primary audiences (members, surfers, seekers)?
3. What is the budget for the site? Is there room to grow?
4. Who will design the site? Who will administer and maintain it?

For up-to-date help and ideas, consider these resources:

- Free Web space for UMYF groups at <http://umyf.net>.
- General Board of Global Ministries free Web space and tips at <http://gbgm-umc.org/docs/webpages.html>.
- Web tips at <http://www.umcom.org>.
- Internet tools from United Methodist Communications at <http://www.umcom.org>.

E-Mail

E-mail allows quick, inexpensive, and timely sharing of news and reminders. Many people say this is their preferred way to receive information.

Listservs (electronic mailing lists) can be developed to which members can subscribe. Any member of the Listserv can send out a question or a topic of discussion, and the e-mail goes to everyone else on the list. Subscribers can answer to the entire list or personally to the author. Discussion groups with particular topics can be formed using a Listserv. Church members who use a Listserv say it is a wonderful way to stay connected.

The pastor of a small United Methodist congregation in California sends an e-mail to subscribing members each Wednesday morning to keep in touch and to offer an inspirational message.

Here are other ideas: establish electronic prayer chains and requests; disseminate church news for former members; create an electronic version of your newsletter. Always ask members before listing their e-mail addresses publicly.

Benevolence Interpretation

You and the other members of your church are part of a worldwide ministry of love and care. That ministry is supported by every congregation through apportioned funds, special Sundays, and support of the Advance for Christ and His Church. Congregations are enriched by regular communications about United Methodism's amazing missions connection and how it is funded.

Telling about these ministries and promoting the fair-share support of the benevolence funds are important tasks of your congregation's leadership team. As communications coordinator, you can locate stories and resources and suggest strategies to communicate effectively. Fortunately, there are materials and people who can help:

- See your pastor first. Materials describing the work of the wider church are sent to the pastor's office regularly. Pastors can pinpoint people and resources within your congregation as well as in your region.
- Talk with leaders responsible for missions and United Methodist Women. They may know regional resource leaders who can provide ideas and stories.
- Refer to your conference newspaper as an ongoing source of stories and information.
- Check with your conference resource center, treasurer, or district office for printed and audiovisual resources that will help with interpretation and promotion.
- Search the United Methodist homepages on the World Wide Web. The denomination's homepage (<http://www.umc.org>) is a major portal to access information. Through it you can keep up with daily news, be in touch with your annual conference, and discover the work of the international church. "Church \$ at Work" is a good source of information about the general funds.
- Read *Interpreter* magazine for articles and ideas about benevolence funds and how they expand the ministry and mission of your church.
- Obtain a copy of *The Official Program Calendar of The United Methodist Church*, an excellent source of information about the funds, offerings, and other observances.
- Recognize that throughout the quadrennium, new materials are provided by your annual conference and the general church to promote and interpret conference and general church funds. Many of them can be ordered by calling, toll-free, 888-862-3242.
- Use the Special Sundays as ways of highlighting key ministries. Work with your pastor to schedule these observances. Materials are available to interpret each observance.

Resources

For a complete list of resources for use with this booklet, call the Conference Resourcing Team at United Methodist Communications, 888-CRT-4UMC; or see <http://crt.umc.org>.

United Methodist Communications (UMCom)

This general agency offers communications services and resources to annual conferences and local churches. Offices are located in Nashville, Tennessee; New York, New York; and Washington, D.C. A wealth of resources and

information can be accessed from UMCom's Web site: <http://umcom.org>.
Nashville office phone: 615-742-5400.

The **Conference Resourcing Team** (CRT) within UMCom works primarily with annual conference communicators but also assists local churches with communications planning questions. Call 888-CRT-4UMC; e-mail: crt@umcom.umc.org; Web site: <http://crt.umc.org>.

InfoServ (and address line)—The United Methodist Church's toll-free telephone general information service. Call 800-251-8140 (hours: 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. central time, Monday-Friday). E-mail: Infoserv@umcom.umc.org.

EcuFilm—the film and video distribution service of The United Methodist Church. Write: 810 Twelfth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203, or call toll-free 800-251-4091 to order or to seek a consultation.

Resources for Interpretation of Program and Benevolences

Information and resources regarding the apportioned funds, Special Sundays with offering, and the Advance for Christ and His Church are mailed quarterly to pastors. A complete listing of all available resources on the connectional giving is available on the Web: <http://www.umc.org>. You can order on the Web, or you can call toll free 888-862-3242.

The following ongoing resources will be available 2001–2004:

The Official Program Calendar of The United Methodist Church.

Published annually each summer for the following year. Call 888-862-3242.

Sharing God's Gifts: An Introduction to the Ministries of The United Methodist Church, 2001–2004. Call 888-862-3242.

United Methodists Are . . . A brochure introducing The United Methodist Church to visitors and new members. Call 888-862-3242.

Partnership in Missions. A catalog of Advance projects. Call 888-862-3242.

Telecommunications

The United Methodist Teleconference Connection (UMTC) offers live distance learning events through satellite uplinks. For program schedules and advice on how to buy a satellite dish, write to UMTC, Suite 1948, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115; telephone: 212-870-3802; fax: 212-870-2171.

Other Resources

Cokesbury Service Center. For order information and bulletin service, contact 201 Eighth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37202; telephone: 800-672-1789; TDD/TT: 800-227-4091.

Cokesbury Online. An easy way to search for resources:
<http://www.cokesbury.com>.

The United Methodist Publishing House, 201 Eighth Avenue South, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202-0801; telephone: 615-749-6000; 24-hour voice response unit: 800-672-1789; Web site: <http://www.umph.com>.