

HANDOUT: Tips to make your church newsletter more effective

- “Even in this day of instantaneous communications, the church newsletter is still an important part of a congregation’s overall communication strategy. Why? Because it is one mode of communication that regularly reaches 100 percent of members, including inactive members and infrequent worshippers. A carefully crafted newsletter can build community, reinforce connections, and encourage participation.”
– from *How to Make the Most of your Church Newsletter*, by Ann Michel, for the Lewis Center

- “We put into everybody’s hand a piece of paper where everybody’s got the same news instead of 15 blogs” or websites.
– from national Episcopal newspaper story

- Print adds legitimacy to your message. To print your information adds credence and authority to what you're saying. People perceive printed information as more reliable than online posts, surveys show. When you can touch or take away something tangible, it makes the message “stick” longer and creates a reference point.
– from *Church Marketing Sucks*

What do you include in a newsletter?

Ask: Is this worth passing on to others? Everything you print should be so relevant that people want to share it, to participate, to act on what they read.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Church services/activities/fundraising
 - upcoming and outcomes
 2. Church mission/ministry projects
 - upcoming and outcomes
 3. Reports/minutes from committee meetings
 4. Bible study questions
 5. Personal message by pastor
 6. News of Sunday School/Youth/Small Groups...
 7. Inspirational stories – introduce a new member, share a member’s faith journey, spotlight a church leader (include all ages)
 8. Historical highlights
 9. News from the district/the Oklahoma Conference/our denomination
 10. Prayer requests
 11. Thank-yous
 12. Birthdays/weddings/graduations/deaths...
 13. Recommended reading
 14. An activity for children
 15. Location and times of services, etc.
 16. Contact information for pastor, staff, etc.
 - and point people to your church website
- NOTE: Identify your church’s name and city

SOME UNITED METHODIST NEWS RESOURCES:

1. Articles from the *Contact* newspaper.
You may access these from online. Follow “Publications” link at ww.okumc.org. You have permission to use these in your local church newsletter. These stories are copyrighted; include the paper’s name/issue date.
 2. www.umc.org > Our World > News
 3. UMReporter portal: www.umportal.org (national newspaper, publishes weekly)
 4. Daily and weekly e-newsletters from the United Methodist News Service, the denomination’s news department. Subscribe at: www.umc.org > United Methodist News Service Subscriber Form
 5. UMCOR *Hotline* e-newsletter (United Methodist Committee on Relief). Click to subscribe at: <http://new.gbgbm-umc.org/umcor/newsroom/hotline>
 6. Oklahoma VIM *Share* magazine
 7. www.umcom.org (photos, graphics, stories, and more from UM Communications, the denomination’s media marketing agency)
- NOTE: Include credits & follow copyright laws.

Distributing your newsletter efficiently:

- Monitor and regularly update your mailing list.
- Pay attention to the placement of the mailing label.
- Talk in person with the postal staff to confirm mailing regulations; call the bulk-rate clerk and make an appointment prior to visiting.

Writing for busy people:

1. Remember the five Ws: who, what, when, where, and why.
2. Make the assumption that not "everyone knows" what you know.
3. Use complete names and contact information. Some people, particularly new participants, do not know who Ethel or Bruno is.
4. Avoid excessive chattiness. (Stop with the weather comments!) Stay on point for busy people.
5. Avoid "churchy" language. You are writing for all ages and stages of Christians.
6. Beware of conveying "mixed messages" such as these:
 - a. *"Sunday morning sermon: Jesus Walks on Water. Sunday evening sermon: Searching for Jesus."*
 - b. *"Don't let worry kill you off—let the church help."*
 - c. *"Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married Oct. 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days."*
7. Use acronyms sparingly. Avoid alphabet soup. Example: Not every reader knows "WOW" means "Wonderful on Wednesdays." Spell it out the first time in your article.
8. Use positive language. Avoid a scolding tone.
 - a. *NOT: We can't keep a nice memory garden if people don't help maintain it. Everyone should sign up.*
 - b. *INSTEAD: Join in helping keep our memory garden beautiful. Volunteers will meet Saturday to care for the garden and go out for lunch together. No experience needed. Call Joe Johnson at 555-5555.*
9. You CAN rewrite what someone else submits. You ARE in charge, and it's about reaching your audience, not about the writer.
10. Good spelling + grammar = professionalism. Research shows younger generations expect professionalism in print, both in content and appearance, not "junk mail."
11. Proofread AGAIN. Get help if needed.

Designing for busy people:

1. Aim for impact: don't bury your major news. Place the most important news up front.
2. Be consistent in appearance. Keep design simple and clean. As in your writing, make your design polished, not "junk mail." Templates can be useful. (One source: www.stocklayouts.com.) Generally, a self-designed newsletter probably takes you 10 times longer to create.
3. The Department of Communications can provide you samples to consider, of well-designed UM church newsletters in Oklahoma. Contact Holly, 405-530-2076, editor@okumc.org.
4. Identify, identify. Who provided that article? Who/what is in that photo(s)?
5. Avoid clip-art clutter. Avoid mixing lots of type fonts. Both make your product look cheap and, often, outdated.
6. Colors of paper can detract. Dark colors make the printing harder to read.
7. Wide columns are harder to read.
8. Use photos that are in focus!
9. Bulleted lists are good.
10. Hard to read:
 - SENTENCES PRINTED USING ALL CAPITALS
 - *Lengthy sections that use all italics*
 - Type that is too small.
 - Excessive!!! punctuation??? detracts!?!?!?!?
11. Be careful with visual choices. Do stock photos/graphics represent your local church?
12. About fonts: Reading in print and reading on-screen differs. A type font that looks great on paper may be much harder to read on-screen. (from www.About.com > Desktop Publishing)
13. Short on space? Put part of an online article in the newsletter, then point readers to more on the Web.

A final note: The devil is not in the details. Your reputation is.