A Communications Toolkit

for the Local Church

compiled by the Salisbury Diocesan Communications team

Parish & People is grateful for permission to edit and adapt the team's work for national use.

For the original web-based version of the Toolkit, visit
www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/
communications/support

Published Spring 2012

Read This First

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father, who is in Heaven." - Matthew 5:16

"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." - Westminster Shorter Catechism

First things first

This is about making it easier for others to appreciate the glory of God and what he may be doing in their lives. It's about promoting God's standards of love, service and leadership. It's also about celebrating life in Christ to the extent that others will want to join in.

Many times, local churches are aware of their local communities and are actively involved, but their communities simply don't know how much the church is doing. Good news stories are sought by radio stations and magazines. Personal stories can resonate powerfully with readers and listeners.

The Toolkit

The authors are keen for you to be confident and effective in communicating the gospel message that sins can be forgiven, lives changed, families and communities transformed, and creation restored.

These days, there are many ways to communicate through print, broadcasting, internet and communications devices. None of these is a substitute for meeting people face-to-face: however, they can make your audience more favourable towards you, and may result in personal contact.

We pray that our Communications Toolkit gives you a start in working out how to do this. We also run training sessions, and can give helpful suggestions and advice if need be.

Read a copy of 'Former BBC Producer Urges Churches to Start Showing Off', available from www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/communications/support

Publicity

Clear, well-designed publicity is essential for communicating with the outside world. It needs to be visually appealing, instantly understandable and readable at a distance. The wider community may not be aware of how many events and initiatives you run. People new to the area may be looking for a church to go to, and might be interested to know your denomination and style of worship, as well as getting an idea of church life. They may also want contact details for their local clergy. Make it easy for them to find out!

Publicity includes:

- Leaflets, flyers, cards and posters
- Church banners, signs and notice boards
- Parish and community magazines
- Parish websites
- Radio, TV and social media
- Stalls and tents at markets, shows or fairs

Consider your audience

This falls into two main groups: existing church members needing information and potential visitors/future members.

Research into the character and priorities of the population of your local area may throw up some surprising results.

Consider your messages

Make a list of the five main things you would like to communicate, and put one or more of these into every single item of publicity you use.

The Five Marks of Mission may help:

www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm

Where to start

Find a volunteer, preferably someone who has designed publicity before and knows what good publicity looks like. Passionate communicators are essential: your volunteer's enthusiasm will make all the difference. www.getyourchurchnoticed.com is very helpful.

Top tips

• Keep the main design neat, simple and uncluttered, with minimal text
• If using photographs, they must be of good quality.
• Put your church logo on everything you communicate with, including your church sign and/or notice board. If you don't yet have one, get someone to design one
• Same for your parish website (see page 9)
• Keep your church notice board tidy and up to date
• Find out where your audience is, and publicise there
• If possible, include full telephone numbers and email addresses so that inquirers can get in touch easily
• Be realistic about the level of detail you allow in a parish magazine. Again, consider your audience.
• The Editor's word is final!

Breaking News

It's often said that "communication is with the receiver". How very true!

The pressure of the newsroom

For every reporter writing the story, there is probably an irate News Editor, or Editor, who is putting pressure on his staff to churn out the maximum number of column inches in record time. In fact, the profession these days is widely known as "churnalism" rather than journalism, since reporters typically spend their day in front of a computer, churning out re-written press releases instead of being 'out there', meeting real people and reporting their stories.

Oddly enough, this can work to your advantage. Imagine the hard-pressed sub editor with 10 minutes to go until deadline and a space to fill. If (s)he is presented with a well-written media release (see page 7) - better still if there is a usable picture - it is a gift to the journalist. All (s)he has to do is knock it into shape to fit the space. Box ticked, job done.

The other thing to bear in mind is that the journalist may be under pressure to re-jig the piece to make the introduction more sensational. There is not a lot you can do about this except be prepared to answer any questions, carefully worded, should the paper or magazine ring you back to "check a few facts". Include your phone number or email: this may well make the difference between your piece being used or relegated to the "spike", i.e. the bin.

Radio interviews

We've all been in a position where we give a reply and then think: "I didn't mean it to come out like that". If the interview is live, you have no way of taking back what you just said. But if it's pre-recorded, you may get a second chance if you mess up. In this case, try to make that section unusable and ask the interviewer to re-record so you can say what you really meant.

What makes 'news'?

The clue is in the name: it should be 'news'-worthy. It should probably be local, unusual, quirky, record-breaking, or having a profound effect on the community - any or all of the above. And you don't need to use flowery prose - the days of Desmond Hackett, who used to write sports reports with lines like "the night, like a black inverted basin ....." are long gone.

Top tip
The catch-phrase is KISS: 'Keep It Simple, Stupid'.

Writing a media release

A media release is a news story which grabs the attention of the reader within the first paragraph. It should, wherever possible, include the "four Ws": Who? What? Where? When? (And perhaps 'Why?')

1.   It helps if you can find an "angle" on the story. The media will be looking for the quirky or amusing. Failing that, you should make it clear what the story is about. Many years ago, a district reporter in Frome filed copy on a new sports centre which had just been officially opened. The weather, the band and the ladies' hats were described in great detail. In the final paragraph, he casually mentioned that cracks had already appeared in a wall at this brand new facility. So what's the real story?

2.   Place the facts in descending order of importance.

3.   Use quotes where you can. Somebody's personal opinion, or account of an event, adds colour and makes the story come alive.

4.   Choose a simple, punchy headline that sums up the main point of your story.

5.   Use fairly short sentences without clauses and sub-clauses. This keeps your copy crisp. Remember, the average Daily Mirror reader has a reading-age of eight! Try reading it back out loud. If it sounds good that way, you're probably on to a winner. Keep paragraphs short and be concise; try not to have more than six or seven paragraphs.

6.   If there is a photo opportunity, make sure you mention it.

7.   Establish media contacts by ringing relevant radio, TV and print media, asking for the name of a journalist to send it to and being enthusiastic about the story. Email the release to your named journalists, using your punchy headline as the subject.

8.   Follow up with a phone call if you haven't heard back. If your story isn't used, find out why, as a learning exercise. Keep trying, and keep building relationships.

Parish Websites

A good website is essential in order to communicate with the outside world. Think of it as a window on parish life. It needs to be visually appealing, easy to navigate and informative.

Consider your audience

As with all publicity, there are two main groups: existing members needing information and potential visitors/future members. Make a list of (a) who is likely to visit you, (b) what they might be looking for, and (c) what you can offer them.

• People new to the area may be looking for a church to go to, and might be interested to know your denomination and style of worship, as well as getting an idea of church life. They may also want contact details for their local clergy

• Couples looking to get married may be seeking an attractive nearby church which gives them immediate online help with costs and tips, including music

• Parishioners may be looking for service times, for the latest news or for photos, especially if they know they are going to be online. Increasingly, they will expect audio visual material from services, including sermons.

Where to start

Find a volunteer, someone who is at home on the Internet, to manage the site for you. The technical knowledge required is modest, and affordable web design and set-up services are available. It is important to select a passionate communicator: your web manager's enthusiasm will make all the difference.

www.AChurchNearYou.com is the national network for all Church of England parishes, so you would do well to visit, log in and use their tutorial to help you update your details. It may also give you ideas for your own website.

There are a number of parishes that link to their websites from their 'A Church Near You' listings: if you like the look of a particular website, contact the parish and ask them how they got started.

www.ChurchEdit.co.uk advises a number of parishes across the country on parish websites, and provides a comprehensive service, including web hosting.

Top tips

- Choose a short, memorable name easy to reproduce on letters, publicity and noticeboards. *www.ruralanglicanparishofstaldhelmthegreatindorshire.org.uk* is too long: *www.stagdorshire.org.uk* is better
- Register with Google. Browse for 'register my website with Google'
- Also consider Facebook, which gets more traffic than Google. See below on Social Media (page 12)
- Keep the front page simple and uncluttered, with minimal text
- Provide a 'Search' box within your web site

- Good quality photography is essential: either your own, or free pictures from the likes of www.freefoto.com. NB: if you use copyrighted images without permission, you may get fined!
- Environmental tip: publish your notices and pew sheets online and save paper
- Think about who will run the site week-to-week and keep it 'alive'. It's no good if, for instance, only one person knows how to update the site and then moves away
- Keep the structure of your website simple, and therefore easy to update and maintain
- **Keep it up to date!**

Social Media

Social media websites enable users to communicate with each other in a number of different ways via the Internet. Each type has its own set of possibilities, strengths and weaknesses. Social media opens up new ways to communicate and direct people to your website.

1.   Do your homework. Social media is a new area and you need to know who you're aiming at and what they're interested in. When choosing which media to use, be very clear why you're using it.

2.   Keep it frequently updated. Social media is fast-moving: users often check in daily.

3.   Social media can actually save time. You can set up a news feed from your website which automatically updates Facebook and Twitter, for instance.

4.   If your social media is open to the public, be aware of potential hazards. You may get people posting unhelpful comments or links. Monitoring needs to be built in.

5.   Social media creates a sense of community, but is not an end in itself. Ensure that it keeps people informed and interested rather than replacing face-to-face contact.

6.   Find an enthusiastic volunteer to run your social media for you, and keep in touch.

7.   Anything you post is in the public domain. There is no privacy once it's on the Internet.

Blogs

Personal diaries, commentaries or websites. Authors post regularly or periodically, and comments are invited. Blogs can add personal colour, insight and interest to a website, including pictures and links to online applications such as Library Thing or Flickr.

Strengths: easy to set up and use

Weaknesses: there are lots of other blogs. You will have to work hard to get noticed and remain distinctive. You may have to monitor comments as you get better known

Twitter

Sometimes called 'micro-blogging'. Twitter users send out messages of 140 characters at a time, known as 'tweets'. Users can follow other users and share private messages. Tweets can present your personality, reach the wider world with the gospel, or direct followers to your blog or website. You can also forward others' tweets to your followers as 'retweets'.

Strengths: easy to set up and use

Weaknesses: limited to text and links to pictures. You may need to monitor comments. Followers may be fickle and stop following after a while. Some profiles may contain undesirable details

Forums

A number of websites use a forum to discuss relevant topics. Each topic is called a 'thread', which appear either in order of posting or as replies displayed underneath a specific post within the thread. Posting

a topic and inviting responses via email may help gauge strength of feeling on a particular idea, event or issue.

Strengths: easy to use

Weaknesses: localised and limited. If made public, you will need to monitor comments

Facebook

The most popular social networking site, with more hits than Google. Users can build up a detailed profile with links to photo albums, pages of interest and other users. Events and campaigns can be publicised, with one-click displays of posters, images and web addresses that are easy for others to pass onto their friends. You can set up public and private groups.

Strengths: highly versatile

Weaknesses: you may need to monitor comments. Privacy settings or overall layout may be updated at short notice

Flickr and Picasa

Photo sharing websites. Pictures are uploaded into online albums and 'tagged' with themed keywords. These keywords can then be found by those searching for specific royalty-free images. Setting up an album in advance for an event where the photos will be updated throughout the day may be of interest to the media. Photos must be of good quality.

Strengths: targeted at specific interests

Weaknesses: a specialist area

YouTube and Vimeo

Video sharing websites. Videos are uploaded and tagged as for Flickr, and can be found by those searching via keywords.

Strengths: very popular sites

Weaknesses: depending on your settings, you may need to monitor comments or video responses. You also need to be very careful regarding copyright of video or music clips.

Social media platforms

Updating the platform can automatically update several social media pre-selected by you. Thus, one message added to the platform can update Facebook, Twitter etc with the same message. Ensure that there is a web link back to a story or page on your website. Each platform has a 'dashboard' so that you can track responses, retweets and comments.

Strengths: same message across all media

Weaknesses: same message across all media. Using Twitter limits the size of message to 140 characters

Examples: HootSuite, Seesmic

Legal status of text posted anywhere on the Internet

From the official Church of England Social Media Policy:

> *"Information on the web is deemed to be a published entity and so is open, for example, to libel action, for as long as it is*

accessible on the web and up to 12 months after it has been
taken offline. Information can also be easily stored and
retrieved from the web."

In other words, be very careful what you say, as it can be taken down and used in evidence against you!

Pastoral issues and Young People

Social media is, potentially, a minefield for vulnerable adults and young people. If in doubt, contact your Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Further Reading

The official Church of England Social Media Policy is available from the Communications Support page on our website. We recommend that you read it before you start.

www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/communications/support

Churches as Media Locations

TV and film companies employ researchers who look for locations to act as a background set for news, documentaries, TV dramas and even feature films. From time to time, locations in our parishes have been used.

Main reasons for getting involved

1. It's a mission opportunity. Location Managers are always looking for film-friendly churches and good reputations can spread
2. It's a real boost for your community if you are selected for filming
3. You will help overcome the perception that churches are difficult to work with, unprofessional and naïve about contracts and fees

Locations could include

- The church building itself
- Your churchyard
- Your church hall
- The car park
- An alleyway next to your churchyard

Getting started

Regional Screen Agencies are very helpful, and their websites have lots of advice to view and download.

Do your homework and be clear ahead of time what associated subject matter you will allow when your premises are depicted.

Take good quality photos of possible locations and upload them to your website.

Register your church as a location, so that location scouts can find you easily.

www.ukfilmcouncil.co.uk/fundedpartners