



Effective Communications for Flourishing Churches



This booklet is designed to help you consider the role of effective communications in the life of a flourishing church or benefice - communications with groups of people and the public.

WHAT ARE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS?

It means that key information:

- **reaches intended audiences in a timely and regular manner**
- **is found readily by those seeking it**
- **is received in a timely manner by those who have asked to receive it**

For our communications to be truly effective they have to be about more than just communicating information such as when our services take place, who to contact for marriages or funerals, or what the history of our building is (even if it involves some notable historic figures).

They have to be about our identity, our values and our purpose too.

Tone and context of communications are important; although this is easier in a conversation than in public, mass communications.

Style and branding become vitally important to denote and disclose who we are as well as what we say. Of equal importance is the choice of channels (print/

web/social media for example) and frequency of communication.

When considering print, web, and social media communication there are many different possibilities including but not limited to: articles in parish magazines; pewsheets; banners outside your church (about £50 each and worth every penny); A Church Near You website; bespoke websites; Facebook pages and groups; Instagram; fliers; and that golden piece of advertising that money can't buy – word of mouth. This isn't a pick and mix list, do as many as you can! They reach different audiences as well as allowing information to be seen and reinforced too.

At the heart of good communications there are three simple questions, recognizing that 'simple' is not the same as easy:

1. What do you want to say?
2. Who do you want to hear what you say?
3. How do you want to say what you want to say?

1. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY?

In very general terms, we want to tell people about the Good News of Jesus Christ. There are so many ways of doing this that we ought to focus on what works for most of the time in our culture and context. This is expressed in our vision:

the vision we share widely with all Christians: sharing Christ's love

the vision that comes from our leaders: Living God's Love

the vision that comes from our context: our parish's or benefice's mission and purpose.

'Vision' is a term that is used a lot in secular leadership writing and management workshops. There is, after all, 'nothing new under the sun'.

Despite the fact, or maybe because of the fact, 'vision' is a profoundly Christian concept that is not often

explicitly mentioned (but it is mentioned) in Scripture, but is implicit throughout Scripture.

Vision is about being dissatisfied with the way things are now and allowing the hope for a better future to impact how we live today. There is a more detailed look at Vision in the Mission Action Planning Booklet.

WHEN I HEARD THESE WORDS I SAT DOWN AND WEPT, AND MOURNED FOR DAYS, FASTING AND PRAYING BEFORE THE GOD OF HEAVEN.

NEHEMIAH 1.4

In that sense vision is connected to theological concepts such as forgiveness, repentance, redemption and restoration. It also means that vision has a prophetic element to it: it speaks against injustice in our community and society and invites people to share and be motivated by that vision to bring it to reality. In very practical terms this means that your church and/or benefice will be communicating the message of the Good News when you invite people to ministry and mission activities of the church through noticeboards, newsletters, emails, text messages, social media, websites, banners, printed publicity. You will communicate the Christian hope through services and sermons, occasional offices and festival events. You will be connected to your community through school's work, nursing homes, and encouraging and equipping members to live out their faith in their daily routine of work, rest, and play.

In terms of vision it means your core leadership team (this will vary from context to context) should work on

a Mission Action Plan – and will communicate this to the church and the community. It means that there ought to be a well-informed PCC where mission is at least as important, if not more so, than the maintenance of the church. Your congregation will know the vision of the church and be emotionally and spiritually connected and invested in it – and excited by it. There will also be a wider community that knows the church is open, thriving, active, and is there for them when they need it.

Four key values underpin the Diocesan vision of Living God's Love

All of this means you will need the four key values of the diocesan vision.

- imagination
- joy
- generosity
- courage



2. WHO DO YOU WANT TO HEAR YOUR MESSAGE?

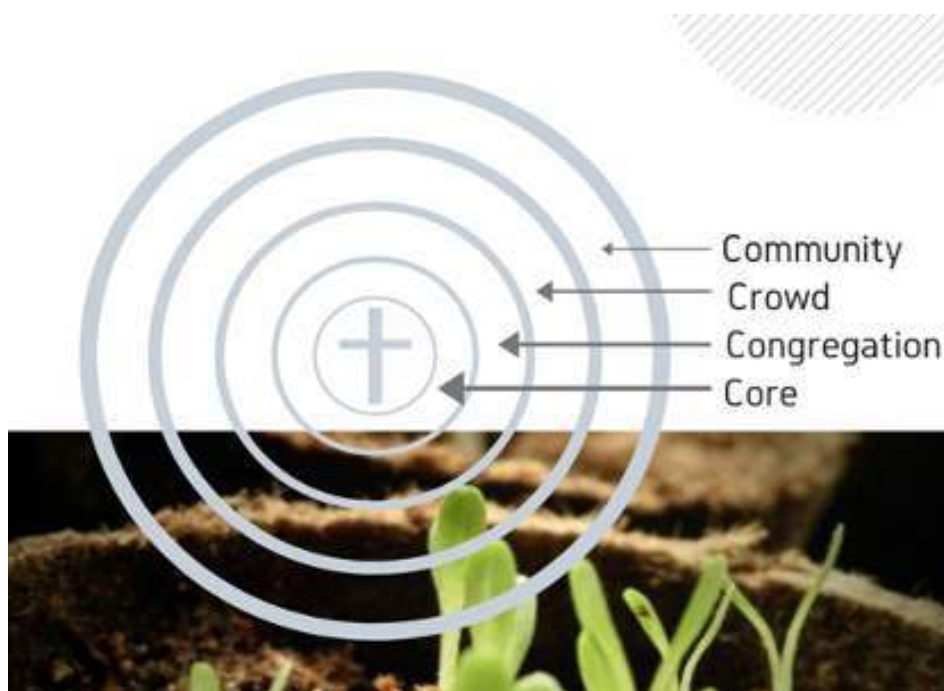
Above was brief mention of the leadership of the church, the congregation and the wider community. We know that the Good News is for everyone. That means that our message is for everyone too – the danger is that if our message is for everyone, it ends up being for no one.

Considering which group we want to communicate with will, to some extent, dictate what and how we communicate it. It will still be the Good News: but how we 'package' and present that will be different for different groups. For example, not everyone needs

to know the news about Messy Church, so target your approach or everyone will stop reading if too much is irrelevant to them.

In his ministry, Jesus communicated differently with his core disciples, his wider group of followers, the crowds who made the effort to find him, the general public he went to, and the religious authorities of the day.

Most churches today will have a core, a congregation, crowds who come for festivals, and a community for whom the church exists, but who have never attended.



How we communicate to these different groups and how we say what we want to say will be different.

3. HOW DO YOU WANT TO SAY WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY?

Knowing the best medium for the target group is essential. Only emailing your message means you will not reach the offline community and probably will not reach your young people either (they prefer direct messaging or WhatsApp). Only putting something in the parish magazine will not reach the busy working person, or the youth. Only having a good website is not enough, the community and crowds need to know it's there. Your 'A Church Near you' page will appear higher up the Google rankings than your own church website and therefore needs to be up to date and populated with as much current content as possible. Some churches are now choosing not to have a website as the A Church Near You page has so many capabilities. Similarly, your Facebook page is a good vehicle to 'push' people to your website or A Church Near You page.

This article may help you think through some of these issues in greater detail.

www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index/A-plan-for-your-communications

For more tips visit - **www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Social-Media-Guidelines.pdf**

This link also contains useful information on the boundaries between private and public aspects of using social media, confidentiality and the legal framework.

This is a 'tick-box exercise'. Effective communication is much more than this, but this tool is designed to be something that can be a conversation starter in a PCC meeting. If you spend 15 minutes going through this list and coming to an agreement, you will be able to identify some needs in your church. Why not take the pressing needs first, and create a 'working group' to tackle them one at a time? For bigger projects don't forget to add them to your MAP – this will keep the conversation 'live' at PCC meetings and make sure you are prioritizing and focusing on key areas.

Don't forget to be in touch with the Flourishing Churches team and Communications Team – we may have some advice and resources available that will make your mission and ministry a bit easier.

	AN URGENT NEED	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Church notices need to be revised. They should be shorter and directly linked to the vision of the church.				
Updating noticeboards and websites to make them feel contemporary and relevant				
Make use of your A Church Near You webpage – likely the first page to appear in a Google search if someone enters the name of your parish and so key for occasional offices in particular. Keep it up to date and consider using it as your website if your needs are simple.				
Revise the leadership structure of the church/benefice so that it encourages good communication from leadership to congregation and vice-versa. Recognise that communication is a shared responsibility but that it also needs leadership				
Ensure that news about events, mission and ministry is communicated in a variety of different media, e.g., website, social media, email newsletter, church notices in the service, printed publicity and, most importantly, personal invitation.				
Update the contact list and consider categorizing it in a GDPR compliant manner. For example, have a system to note regular attenders, 'crowd' (sometimes also called the fringe) and occasional attenders, those who have joined the church just that year, etc.				
Make sure it is easy and apparent how a new person to your church 'signs up' to be part of what you are doing.				
Revise how you communicate with your 'crowd'. Could it be done more efficiently?				