

Welcoming Publications

I don't know about you, but I pretty much expect to find a bulletin handy when I walk into most LCMS churches. Bulletins are a time-honored way to make announcements and guide us through the order of service. Congregations also use newsletters, fliers, websites, Facebook pages and changeable signage. However, we often get so used to seeing these resources that we forget to look at them through a visitor's eyes. With that in mind, here are some ideas to help you use your publications to engage those who may not be "in the know":

Establish a header or footer for your bulletin and newsletter.

This should include the main congregational contact information, such as address, phone number, website, email, pastor's name and any other pertinent names, like the secretary, church president or organist. This makes it easy for newcomers to know how to get ahold of someone if they have a question or concern.

Bonus tip: Include a standard signature line in all church emails with congregational contact information!

Never assume that readers will "just know" something.

This means absolutely everything publicized should have the "who, what, where, when" listed. When the church picnic has been held in the city park at noon on the Fourth of July for the last 50 years, it can be easy to assume that everyone in town knows. However, we want to make sure that everyone knows and feels welcome, so be sure to list all those details.

Go beyond the bulletin.

Bulletins are great, but only those actually in church are seeing them — and let's face it, some people don't do a great job reading all the announcements. Make use of multiple forms of media for your publicity and you will reach a whole new crowd!

Have a Web presence!

An effective website is really important because this is the tool that more and more people turn to first. When people visit or move into a new area, they often use the Web as their tour guide.

- If you haven't already done so, create a URL (digital address) that is short and easy to remember in association with your congregation, such as your church name and city. Then get it out there on all your publicity materials, and ask your members to share your site as well.
- Keep your site simple to use.
- The homepage needs to create a strong first impression, so have an "I'm New" section for visitors.
- Be sure to list the basics, like worship times and the church address. Keep dates current, and go for non-seasonal pictures. Be clear and concise with a statement of belief, FAQs and easy directions for visitors.
- Also consider including a sign-up for a service project. This is a great way to get some people involved through a side-door invitation.

- Last but not least, introduce your pastor, include some sermons and always offer a clear, welcoming invitation to worship and Bible study, as well as any other fellowship opportunities!
- Don't forget that the website is always going to need maintenance and upkeep. Treat it like a living thing!

Set up a Facebook page for your congregation.

This is great place to have a slightly more interactive conversation. You should have an intentional posting schedule with your church Facebook page. Share events, prayers and news, but always be respectful. The goal should be to develop relationships and share the Gospel in a personal and inspirational way, while keeping people posted about what's happening with the congregation. Consider posting one to two times a day. Too little, and you will lose people's interest; too much, and you will annoy them.

Don't forget that many of the things we already do can be tweaked for outreach simply by looking at them through a visitor's eyes. How can we make people feel welcome and included? Be sure to have good, updated signage on your property, and it cannot be overstated to never forget to include dates, times and places. This means on your signs, in the bulletin and in any other place where people might find information, such as fliers, T-shirts, websites or Facebook. The important thing to remember is to make people feel welcome and reach out for Christ!

If you have a question or would like help with how to do any of these things, contact our office or view our Welcoming Publications webinar for a more in-depth look at this topic.

Contributed by Amy Gerdtz, project coordinator, LCMS Rural & Small Town Mission. RSTM supports and encourages rural and small town congregations in engaging their communities and growing together in Christ through Word and Sacrament. If you have a good idea for outreach or a story you'd like to share so that we can share it with others, please email Amy Gerdtz at amy.gerdtz@lcms.org. Learn more about us at www.lcms.org/rstm, by calling our office at 888-463-5127, by email at rstm@lcms.org or "like" us on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/lcmsrstm.