



Tips to Rock Your Church NEWSLETTER

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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A church newsletter can be an effective way to communicate important church news and information with members of your congregation and the wider community. Done well, your newsletter can help people stay connected through updates and announcements and draw people in closer to your church's mission and ministry.

CONTENT

"We had a church newsletter for a few months but the biggest problem was that we weren't really sure what we were trying to accomplish with it. It was part devotional, part fundraiser, part announcement. In the end, it all got a bit muddled and we ended up having to scrap it and start again."

No newsletter should go out "just because." What are you trying to communicate to your readers? Newsletters need a clear purpose and relevant material from the very beginning so that both you and your readers know why it's valuable.

Is your content balanced? A good rule to follow is that your newsletter contains roughly 90% educational material and 10% promotional material. If you make it too much of a promotion, it will read like a flyer. And if it's all educational, you miss an opportunity to raise awareness about the work your congregation is doing.

What is the tone? Is it a formal document or maybe more relaxed and conversational? Whatever tone you choose, edit to ensure the newsletter remains consistent, especially when different people contribute content.

Who should contribute content? Encourage submissions from everyone. This can help foster a spirit of pride in the newsletter as everyone likes to see their name in print. Having a few guidelines on the type of content you're looking for as well as article length and photo requirements can be helpful.

Does your church newsletter accurately represent you? Try to avoid filling it with stock photos and clipart; it's much better to use real photos of your church and congregation.

Is there a call to action? The most effective church newsletters include a "call to action"; that is, a clear request or way to engage further. It could be an ask to bake cookies for a fundraiser, or a request for volunteers. It could be a call for donations. It could also be more subtle like asking people to spread the word. Whatever your call to action, try to ensure it's clear to readers what you want them to do with the information you provide.



Who is the newsletter geared to? In general, it's usually best to gear your newsletter content for those who don't attend your church services regularly. For that reason, you need to put your best foot forward. Avoid using acronyms that aren't clearly spelled out or church lingo people may not be familiar with. A newcomer may view a copy of your newsletter and you want to make sure they are left with a positive impression.

FORMAT

"I don't know why our church prints a newsletter every month when I can go online and read all the same information—and save a few trees in the process."

"Our minister has asked us to read the newsletter online, but it hurts my eyes to read off a computer for long. I end up not reading the newsletter at all, which makes me feel left out and disconnected."

The decision between producing a print or electronic newsletter is a difficult one. Some people feel a print issue is necessary in order to, quite literally, get it into the hands of congregants. Others feel that using precious natural resources to produce a newsletter is unnecessary. I strongly recommend asking a wide and diverse group of people their opinion, as you may find answers change between different demographics and backgrounds.

Should we have both an electronic and print version? Many congregations have found success using a print-electronic combination. It can be more time consuming to create both a print and electronic newsletter, yet this may be the most effective way to reach the widest group of people. A common error with this system, however, is that some people simply take their print copy, scan it in, then send it out electronically. Rarely is this effective. People read quite differently online than they do in print. While on print people may read more lengthy articles from start to finish, online reading is usually skimmed, so catchy headlines, bullet points and graphics become much more important.

DESIGN

“Our church has a print newsletter that looks the same as it did when it was first launched over ten years ago. As the person who puts it together every month, it’s a lot of work for me to compile and it just doesn’t get the attention it deserves. I don’t know why we bother.”

A good newsletter design is one that can adapt and grow. Many churches have never updated the look and feel of their newsletter for years, and that means it may not be serving you as well as it could. A fresh new design can inject new life into your newsletter.



Lookin’ good? Just as in face-to-face interaction, we form opinions and judgements about the look of something very quickly. When producing your newsletter, it’s important to keep your standards high and create something that is both functional and attractive in order to get the most positive response.

What details about the layout are important? Take the time to check for consistency in fonts, font sizes, margins, spacing, headings, etc. You don’t want to overwhelm people with colours and fonts—simple is almost always preferred. Check to make sure your newsletter isn’t too busy with text boxes, pop-out boxes, overlapping images, large captions and other “noise.” White space in margins and around images helps make an article more appealing. You want to strive for a layout that is easy on the eyes.

What online tools are best for creating newsletters? Gone are the days where you need to have accreditation from an arts college in order to work with design programs. Yes, you can certainly do some really sophisticated things that way, but producing a striking, modern-looking newsletter is now something anyone can achieve.

There are many tools available, often free of charge, to help with creating your newsletter, from photo editing services like PicMonkey that allow you to touch up images, to electronic newsletter distribution and tracking through an easy-to-use service like MailChimp. Plus, don’t forget to consult the PCC Style Guide to help with grammar and editing. You can find links to all these materials at presbyterian.ca/communication.

Tools you can use

Find links to all these materials
and many more at
presbyterian.ca/communications

DISTRIBUTION

“I love our church newsletter but not many people know about it or read it. We mention it during announcements, but it doesn’t seem to help much. We really struggle with getting it out there.”

Whatever format you choose for your newsletter, you need to make sure it is distributed widely. Strive to get your church newsletter directly into the hands or inboxes of members of your church, whether or not they attend service on a regular basis.

Where do I sign up? Would someone new to your church know how to sign up for your newsletter? It’s not enough to put a link at the top of your website and expect people to see it. You need to draw

attention to the newsletter regularly—maybe include a small reminder on how to sign up in your church bulletin, send out e-blasts, have printed copies available for people to pick up in several key spots around the church with contact information, maybe even bring sample copies and sign-up forms with you when visiting members of the congregation.

Just as importantly, it needs to be clear and easy for people to unsubscribe. Canada’s anti-spam legislation requires e-newsletter to have an “unsubscribe” button readily available. Throughout the year, people will subscribe and unsubscribe to your newsletter. Don’t take it personally when someone goes off your list—there are myriad reasons why they would choose to do so. You don’t want someone to be annoyed by your message so whether it’s in print or electronic, make sure they can subscribe or unsubscribe easily.

How often should we put out our newsletter? Set a regular distribution schedule and, generally, less is more. You don’t need to send something out weekly, or even monthly, for it to be successful. The frequency of valuable content should drive your distribution schedule.

How do we solicit feedback about the newsletter? It’s a good idea to take a moment once a year to assess how your church newsletter is doing. Can you improve on the quality of content? Can you make the design more accessible? The best way to find answers is to solicit readers for feedback. You could try issuing a short print or digital survey using a mixture of yes/no and open-ended questions. If you use an electronic service like MailChimp to deliver your e-news, you can review all kinds of analytics including the open rate and the most clicked-on links. This feedback can be incredibly valuable for ensuring you are creating something people use and love!

Do you need help with your church newsletter? Contact the Communications Office at communications@presbyterian.ca or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 243.

