

When we develop the focused message of our ministry a key concept is alignment. If you look at the state of Communications Ministry in the evangelical North American church today, you will see a reflection of the outside world in the tools, methods and media. In fact, we use words like creativity, excellence, broadcast, mass-media, mission and vision more in a corporate sense than anything else. When we do things to align with the world's methodology, then we will end up with results that have--a consumer-oriented, high-quality but low-impact kind of church.

It is essential that:

- We align our message to God's Word. Alignment is sacrificing our goals, desires, ambitions and motives to God's.
- This alignment requires submitting ourselves to the authority of scripture and understanding God's plan for us to make disciples of all nations.
- Though we may have wonderful ideas and creative ways to communicate, we must purposefully focus on God's plan for the ministry we serve.

Church Communication Values

The church needs to identify and communicate its values within its communication system. Kem Meyer suggest that the church;

* Reinforce that we are a unified church working toward a common vision, not a federation of sub-ministries.

* Be driven from the outside-in. That is, there will be a heavier emphasis communicating to those in the outside circles (community and crowd), and a progressively lighter emphasis toward those in the inner circles (congregation, committed and core).

* Focus on the needs of our guests, not the needs of our ministries.

* We will ask more questions than we answer in

Communications--allowing people to absorb and seek on their own terms--drawing them into the content we have to offer.

* Be simple and clear, eliminating unnecessary fluff or complicated content.

* Be designed so that it reduces the noise in people's lives and eliminates competition between ministries. Too much information can be just as dangerous as not enough. Therefore, we will provide the basic information for people to easily scan.

* Actively balance inspiration and information. Therefore, everything will be evaluated in context of the church; not just a ministry audience.

Identify the audience that we desire to communicate with. This is necessary because the needs of the audience vary greatly. Three groups with very different needs come to mind; those persons and groups already assimilated in our ministry. Secondly those who are on the fringe of the ministries, they are sporadic in participation and limited in commitment. Finally there are those who are completely external to our ministry.

Focusing solely on the assimilated who already consider themselves a stakeholder will not communicate the information that the fringe folks need to be motivated or guided into the

ministries of our congregation. A very different communication and method for communication is required to be effective at all for those completely outside the scope of current ministries.

<<http://www.religion-online.org/>>

In our current 21st century context, Dialogue is the preferable model for communication in the Church. The dialogic model of prayer is the primary guidance. We must remain open to God's participation within the dialogue of the church. We must learn to be sensitive to God's speaking within the midst of the communication of the Body of Christ.

The most common form of communication for a church structure is dissemination which is downward communication. The relative few in the leadership arenas, communicate outward to inform, motivate, to guide the church constituency. One of the direct byproducts of not giving constituents a voice in decision-making and plan development is constituents disconnects. With no other options for input constituents choose to vote with their feet or pocket book. They accept and support items, which appeal to them, and they reject and do not engage in options that don't suit them. We often classify this as "consumerism" in a church. However it is likely a disenfranchisement.

Communication seeking input is much less common. There exists the possibility of developing a formative dialogue. Churches of all sizes have some leadership circle utilize some manner of formative dialogue. This internal dialogue most often stays within the leadership circle, it prevents constituent input and severely limits constituent buy in. One of my former chairs of deacons was an engineer in charge of research and development. One of his mantra to the rest of his engineers was: "If giving more time will give us a better quality decision, let's invest the time. If not let's decide now." This quality improvement could be the primary impact of dialogue which offered to involving entire church bodies. The outcome would take longer to achieve. The product would not look like it did in the minds of the small leadership circle. But dialogue used to form major church initiatives or body life issues, should be much more reflective of constituent values.

Some leaders might be reluctant to risk their "good ideas" to the whims and choices of the constituents. Some might not feel secure enough to work with the opinions and input of others. Some leaders fear rejection of their leadership if congregational input is in the dialogue. A church wide dialogical process or a blog can provide considerably more congregational input. A Blog is a web page that is constantly updated with commentary, news, and/or links about a particular topic.

A more important consideration is viewing the congregation as the body of Christ, able to speak the mind of Christ. I fear we limit God's voice when we do not engage in formative dialogue.

Shared Responsibility is a necessary ingredient in the life of a vital high functioning congregation. All church members must be challenged to accept responsibility as a community

specifically called-participating actively in the Church's life and mission. **Kasper** notes that this marked the end of a pattern of a welfare Church.

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<http://kemmeyer.typepad.com/less_clutter_noise/church/index.html>

There is a necessity to develop a basic communications plan and then stick to it. Having this basic plan will provide instruction in the development of communication efforts and a frame work for evaluation of effectiveness.

1. Identify the key messages do you want to convey?
2. To whom are we seeking to convey the key messages
3. Identify the best approach to reach each key stakeholder, including who/how should the message be conveyed?
4. Build in an evaluation stage to validate that we are reaching these stakeholders.

Obviously, modern communications media are extremely important in this kind of consultative process. A blog is a relatively new tool that can be very effective in communicating shared governance on the part of congregational leadership. It can be particularly helpful to ministry leaders to communicate and get feedback on ideas that are emerging.

How can a Blog help congregational leadership or ministers?

- Decreases deficiencies found in traditional knowledge transfer
- Improves distribution of information throughout your organization
- Captures information for short and long term reference
- Fosters communication of information across the system
- Accommodates collaborative discussions

It is possible to focus and limit blog participation to a ministry team.

- From concept origination to implementation.
- Posts automatically emailed to team
 - Keeps issue before team members
- Keeps conversation “on task”