



For your consideration.
a series on issues facing church
communicators today

STOP Declining Church Attendance With Your Church Communications



Yvon Prehn

Effective Church Communications

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By Yvon Prehn

Effective Church Communications



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ISBN-13: 978-1542681056

ISBN-10: 1542681057

Published by:

Effective Church Communications Ventura, California
www.effectivechurchcom.com

Stop Declining Church Attendance With Your Church Communications

Cover design by Yvon Prehn.

Content in this book also appears in excerpts on the website www.effectivechurchcom.com and in the book *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing*.

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Author's Preface

From Yvon Prehn

Church attendance is declining both in fewer new people coming to church and current members coming less often—that's our challenge—but we can stop and reverse it.

You know that the solution to this challenge isn't going to be solved by a 500-word blog post of bullet points about the latest and greatest tech tool or social media to come along that will solve all your church communication problems and get people flooding back to our churches. You know you won't be able to get people returning to church if you can simply find more contemporary graphics or upgrade to a more cutting-edge look to your website.

But we keep hoping, don't we?

What follows is not a quick read filled with magic solutions. It will take time to read, digest, and plan implementation because the issue of declining church attendance and retention is not an easy issue to understand with easy answers to fix it. There are many parts of church theology, growth, and health that factor in and what follows is not an all-inclusive solution, but one that focuses on church communications that can make a big difference in reversing this trend.

My observations and recommendations that follow aren't a result of impersonal surveys or statistics, but from my personal experience and analysis of over three decades of working with churches and church communications. Not only have I been involved in church communications in my professional life, but as a Bible teacher (MA in Church History, attended seminary, taught at a Jesuit university), I've been actively involved in my local church. I don't claim scholarly or corporate authority, but humbly offer observations and suggestions as someone who has for many years and is currently working with thousands of churches all over the world to teach them effective church communication skills like what I will be sharing in this publication and as one who cares deeply about sharing the gospel of Jesus.

Most importantly, the things I suggest work. They aren't quick and easy to implement, but they are effective. Churches grow. Lives are changed. I've seen this happen many times. It can happen in your church.

I trust what follows will be useful to your church and I invite your comments and interaction about it. Email me at yvon@effectivechurchcom.com to share your thoughts.

Now, sit down, get a big cup of coffee (you'll need it) and let's tackle the issues of declining church attendance and what your church communications can do about it.

Declining church attendance and how your communications can help turn that around

It doesn't take the latest Gallup poll or news story for churches to know that overall church attendance is declining. In addition, though the exact numbers may vary, the ever-increasing difference between the number of people on the membership rolls and a far smaller number attending each week is a common situation in many churches.

A related concern is that for those attending church, far too often their lives in business and morality are no different than those outside the church, much to the frustration of church leadership. Church members' lives aren't different, in part, because people are not at church enough to get the instruction that will help them grow in their Christian lives.

Why is this happening and what can a church do about it?

We can't tackle every issue related to declining church attendance, but we can tackle one that will make a big difference and that every church can control and that's in their church communications. From over thirty years of working with churches, I know ***effective church communications can make a big difference of reversing the trend of declining church attendance and stagnant spiritual growth in church members.***

Before I can make specific suggestions of what your church needs to do, you need to understand the big picture and background of what is going on in our world and technology and how this impacts church communications. When we don't take time to understand where we are in the church, we make scattered and often unproductive attempts to change things that don't ultimately work. The following material should help give you useful background to make informed decisions.

Why declining church attendance is happening

To understand why church attendance is declining, there are two major changes in society that a church can't do anything about, but must understand and they are:

#1 Sunday is no longer a sacred day

Stores and restaurants aren't shut as they were in the past and because of that obviously, many people must work on Sunday. If they don't have to work on Sunday, for many it is their only day off to shop, do errands,

or simply catch up on sleep. They don't do these things on Sunday because they don't care about God; it's what they must do to survive.

Most people who work in church offices have never had to face the challenges of a work week that isn't a standard 5-day one with weekends off. Working on weekends, working six days a week, or working at changing shift work is brutal, and not being able to go to church on Sunday isn't something many people willingly choose. It is simply part of what they must do to make a living.

Depending on the demographic make-up of your church, the number of people who must work on Sunday may account for a large percentage of people who don't attend church on Sunday.

Keep in mind however, this does not mean they may not want to be involved in other activities of the church at times they can attend. Does your church have a way to make sure people who aren't attending on Sunday know what's going on at other times in the week? If the primary way you tell people about what is happening at church is on Sunday morning in the bulletin, if members miss that, they may not know about activities during the week they would want to attend. Email, postcards, social media can be proactive ways to inform them.

#2 Sunday is now either sports day, shopping day, sleep-in or me day

Instead of church, there are many substitutes that did not exist in the rural (and not so long ago for many) past when the church was the social center of the community.

Today, the primary activity for many people on Sundays is sports. This is especially challenging for churches because many youth sports are on Sundays and if young people want to take part in sports, or watch and support friends and family members who do, they can't attend church.

For others, their primary loyalty is to their team or teams, real or fantasy, and attention to what is happening with them is their priority. If there is any conflict or overlap with Sunday services, church loses out.

If a person isn't involved in sports, and after a hectic week often shopping, sleeping in, or time for me is far more appealing to many than going to church. For many people, it isn't a conscious decision to NOT go to church, they simply don't care or know they should. What have we done to give them reasons to attend?

The church has been entrusted with the message of forgiveness of sins, peace with God, joy forever, and a satisfying life now. Don't let that message be the best-kept secret in your community.

Churches need to accept that these two societal changes, that Sunday is no longer a sacred day and that many people have other priorities on that day, will not reverse themselves back to the quiet Sundays of rural fantasies, where the church was the only or most exciting thing happening on Sunday. It isn't anymore. This is our world today.

Before we get discouraged about current trends, here are some biblical reminders:

Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against his Church (Matt. 16:17-19) and new work schedules and an obsession with sports, shopping, sleeping-in, and me time ultimately don't stand a chance either.

Jesus also reminded us that in this world we would have trouble, but that he had overcome the world (John 16:33).

We also need to remember that what is important is not necessarily the DAY people attend (Rom. 14:5) and are involved in the church, but that they attend and are involved (Heb. 10:25).

Correctly identify what needs to be done

Considering Sunday no longer being a sacred day and often dedicated to activities other than church services, an obvious solution to the problem would be that churches consider adding a worship time outside the traditional Sunday morning time to meet. That's an excellent idea for any church that can, because many people cannot attend otherwise.

Yet, at the same time, many churches have done this and still struggle with attendance and involvement. What then should a church do? Before we get to specific solutions you need to understand a few more things.

What the church can offer this pre-occupied world

All churches share these truths:

- Your church has the words of eternal life (John 6:60-71). Your message is vitally important to every person on earth.
- The Bible promises us that the Holy Spirit is active in our world, convicting the world of “sin, righteousness, and judgement” (John 16:8).
- People are hungry for spiritual fulfillment. Note the response to every new spiritual guru or writer, TV or internet sensation offering a way to peace. Their message may be false, but they often communicate it well and people respond.

However, amid this huge spiritual hunger in our world, which is motivated by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, people are not coming to the one source, the Church, that is the only true source of eternal life, forgiveness, and peace through faith in Jesus.

This is not happening because the Church is deficient or Jesus is no longer Savior. ***This is happening because the church is not communicating who it is and how it can meet the deepest needs of people.***

Very few people in our world today think of the Church (and local churches anywhere) as THE source of salvation, truth, or eternal life. In many churches, current members who do not attend often, and most certainly most of the people in the neighborhood of your church, have little to no idea of what a church does on a weekly basis, let alone how it can meet the spiritual needs in their lives or help them grow to spiritual maturity.

Many people who attend church infrequently or who attended church as a child have no idea that Jesus expects them to grow in their Christian lives. Many churches members are unaware that the Great Commission Jesus gave his church was to “make disciples” and you need to be involved in a church to grow as one. They don’t know that the Biblical goal for the church is not to make people comfortable or wealthy but to present every member “mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). These goals are not optional or only for super-spiritual churches. They are what Jesus expects of us. Church members don’t know these things or participate in their fulfillment, because often the Biblical expectations of Christian maturity are not communicated effectively.

At its core, church attendance issues are church communication issues.

That statement is an easy one to make, but let’s now more closely at what it involves.

3 reasons why the Church has a communication problem

#1 Our world is no longer Christian in its primary world view and we can't communicate as if it still was.

To understand how this impacts church attendance, it's not important to analyze philosophical paradigm shifts to a post-modern mentality or any of various associated theories and then avoid responsibility because we don't understand what that means. The reality is that, regardless of the label, most people have no idea why churches are relevant to their lives and a place to find answers to life and eternity.

In the past people grew up with the Christian world view as part of their mental heritage. Most people today (sadly, including many in your church) would be hard pressed to even define a Christian world view. In the past, the Bible was read in school, the morals of it an expected standard in public life. People might not like it or believe it, but if they were looking for salvation, however they defined it, people looked first to the church. People don't today.

#2 Because many church leaders still have a Christian world view and think everyone else does also, churches don't communicate clearly or often enough what the Church is and why it is important to people.

When was the last time your church sent out or prepared a communication piece for your people to give to their friends that shared why the church is important to people and their only hope of true joy on earth and eternal salvation?

This doesn't mean you should become a modern-day Johnathan Edwards, breathing fire and send out copies of modern-day sermons like his "Sinners in the hands of an angry God."

But you do need to let people know your church is there to answer spiritual questions and you are more than a place where health and wealth is preached. You need to work on answering the question in your church staff meetings, "Why should people come to our church as a source of eternal salvation and how are we communicating those reasons to them?"

You can no longer assume that people know the value and messages of the church and are consciously rejecting them. Many today do not know what the church is about or why they should attend. This has happened in part because—

3 By default, the Church has allowed the world to dominate the conversation of what's important by opting out of communicating our message

Because the church has so little place in public conversation, the messages of the world that sports are the most important thing that takes place on Sunday, or this is *the place* to shop or to have fun are what dominate the thoughts of many people. If it isn't sports or shopping, it's the latest celebrity scandal or breaking news repeated every ten minutes that people are obsessed with following.

Need some proof of the previous statement? Think about the media messages you received in the last week. How many came to you in any form, TV, postcards, mail, digital media, emails, print from events you attended (including church) that told you what was happening at church and why it was important as opposed to athletic, celebrity, or consumer messages? Can you think of one message from church (outside of Sunday morning if you attended) that you would pass on to a friend that would make them consider attending an event at church?

I trust by now you can see why we are in the situation we are in. Unfortunately, the news doesn't get much better in the next few pages. (Solutions are coming—hang on!)

How has the church responded to this shifting mind-set and communication challenge in our world?

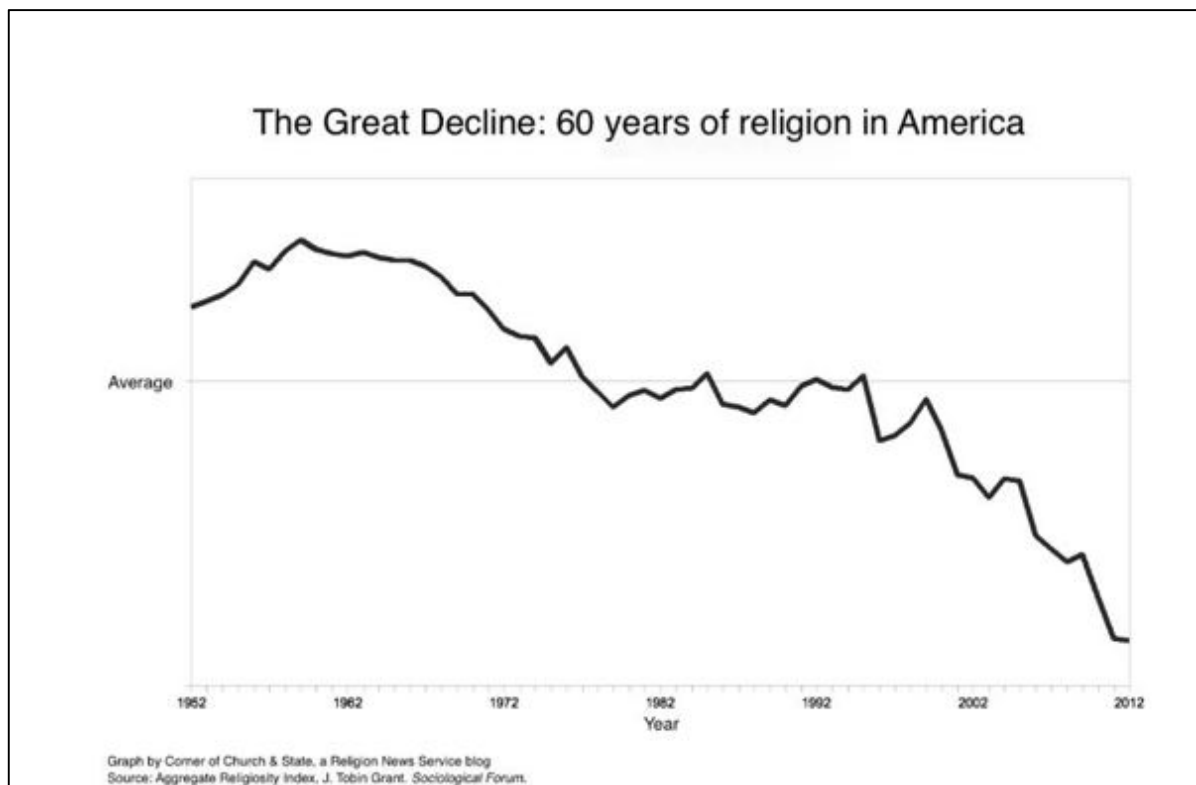
Overall, obviously not successfully or we wouldn't be in the situation we're in today. What follows is fascinating when we look at the impact of technology and communication as a background to what has happened in our churches. Again, remember that the decline in church attendance is affected by many things. We've looked at our cultural mindscape and how the Christian worldview is no longer part of it. The place of technology in our world and how this has affected the church is what we'll look at now.

Changing technology changed communication methods in the church

Please don't think I am bashing technology in any way with what follows. I am all for churches using the latest and best in technology to share the gospel message. I love technology, am always using it to communicate and recommend that churches be the best in adapting and using it.

However, when you look at the decline in religion in America you note some interesting correlations related to changing technology. Though we have incredible tools, we have not been consistent in how we've used them to better communicate the gospel message and keep people in church. We've let technology set the agenda in how we communicate without evaluating its impact. This is evident when you look at correlations between religious decline, growth, and rapid decline with innovations in technology and communication. Following is a chart of religious decline and then my commentary about it:

<http://religionnews.com/2014/01/27/great-decline-religion-united-states-one-graph/>



This chart starts when the shift away from a Christian mindset became widespread through the 60s and early 70s. Predictably there was a big decline in religion during that time.

Good times in church communications

There was then a leveling off and slight up and down, but a more positive trend took place of a gradual increase in religious interest in the 80s and into the early 90s.

It's interesting to note that during that time desktop publishing was invented, laser printers, color copiers, and digital duplicators were in widespread use in churches for the first time. It was an exciting time to be creating church communications because churches could now create and print professionally typeset and designed communications with a computer at church for very low cost.

Churches responded by printing bulletins, inserts, flyers, postcards, newsletters, everything imaginable. Churches were exploding with communications because, in part this was the first time they could do so many things cost-effectively in-house. Many of them weren't fancy, but they were full of content, they got people into church, and grew them in the faith once they were there.

This positive leveling off didn't last and here are possible reasons why

August 6, 1991 the World Wide Web went live. Though it would take a few more years for its use to be widespread in churches and some would note that many churches today are still not making the most of this tool. Social media boomed in the early 2000s.

As these digital media became more and more popular, many churches decided to shift print communications to digital communications.

I can't prove the connection between the shift to digital communications away from print to the decline of religion, but it is worth noting that at about the same time, religion took a steep and rapid decline that continues today.

I may not be able to prove a connection, but it seems valid to consider that though adding digital communications to the communication mix of churches is obviously something we want to do, to quit producing paper-based communications and move communication creation solely

to the digital world has not helped church growth or the discipleship and retention of members.

We forget that the different media communicate in different ways

Many years ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase, “The Media is the Message.” This applies today in that the various media, digital and written, all have their place in communicating the messages of the church, but not every media format is effective in the same ways. They are not interchangeable.

Social media is an interactive, ever-flowing stream, great for social interactions, instant updates and creating community. It has tremendous benefits for church communications.

But it is not the answer to every communication need. It is not a medium that is effective for the sometimes-boring nuts and bolts of church communications such as time the youth group meets, cost of camp, budget details, etc. Written lists, bulletin inserts, static entries on the website work well for communicating and allowing people to retrieve the details that successfully connect people to church events.

Nor is social media a very good medium for in-depth and life-changing Bible teaching or theological instruction. It can spark interest and be a place for dialog, but to understand the ways of God requires more than short bursts of text.

Many churches have confused the popularity of digital and social media with effectiveness in communication. They are not the same. Just because a lot of people are using social media to interact or share where they were last night, pictures of their kids, and what they ate for dinner, doesn’t mean the same medium is providing useful spiritual content, challenge, or instruction.

The most important thing to remember here is that no ONE media will meet all the communication and spiritual growth needs of the church. We need to make the most of every media if we are to communicate all the messages necessary for outreach and growth in discipleship maturity. And that need leads us to the challenge of. . . .

Churches misunderstanding the meaning of "Less is More"

As the popularity of digital communication increased, the saying of "less is more" became a guiding principle for some church communicators. The results have been disastrous for resulting church attendance at special events and at spiritual-growth-producing ministries in the church. In addition to the tragedy of people attending fewer events and therefore missing out on vital church growth opportunities, what is sad is that the practice of creating fewer and shorter communications is based on a false understanding of the phrase.

The statement "Less is More" from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of the pioneers of modernist architecture, has been totally misinterpreted to mean that if you do less of something, somehow that is better.

That is not the intended meaning of the phrase. Following is a clarification of his statement.

"['Less is More' had to do with] how he thought buildings should be constructed. Namely that the building should be stripped of any extras and that it should be constructed on essentials which would lead to clarity, utility and effect."

<http://references-definitions.blurtit.com/29127/what-does-less-is-more-mean-in-architectural-terms>

When you look at Miles van der Rohe's style of architecture, it is clean and uncluttered in form, but certainly not less, not smaller, not lacking in the essentials that make the building what it needs to be to carry out its purposes.

Unfortunately, the way many churches interpreted this is that if we communicate less, then people will attend the events. Read that statement again—it doesn't make sense. People don't attend things more if you communicate about them less.

In practical terms this worked out to using less paper. That meant no bulletin inserts or postcards, flyers, or announcements, all of which are some of the most powerful pieces of communication and connection churches can create because one of the most powerful ways to make sure people attend an event is still a notice on the refrigerator. A few years ago, the USPS did an ad campaign with the slogan "the refrigerator has never been hacked" to emphasize this point.

Or van der Rohe's statement was taken to mean that shorter announcements in paper and on the web, make more sense to people when surrounded by lots of "white space." White space is supposed to make them want to attend more than if you fill the page up with the details of where is the event, time, duration, availability of child care. Don't even bother with other information such as them why they should be there or who is teaching or what difference it can make in their life. Again, no matter how tech savvy and cool the person making these statements appears to be, it makes no logical sense. Leaving out connecting details means leaving out the connections that get people to an event. Leaving out reasons why they should attend doesn't make a church event essential, it makes it irrelevant.

Again, don't misunderstand me. As a publication designer, I'm all for white space—that is why the book you are reading is designed the way it is, with a very generous left-hand margin, comfortable space between the lines of text and what is called a "rag-right" margin that has more white space and retains the natural spacing of words more than justified type.

But many of the people using the term today are not designers and have totally misunderstood its meaning.

The results are even worse in communicating to members, when some churches take the "Less is More" mantra to mean that almost no communication is on paper and it all goes to the web or digital formats. This is very problematic because it ignores the many people in the church who still have little or no access to these forms of communication or even if they do, prefer not to use them as their primary communication source.

What to do about these people who don't get digital communications?

This is not a trivial matter; it is not a matter of taste only in church communications. It touches the core of who we are as Christian communicators, of those who communicate in ways pleasing to our Lord Jesus.

Didn't Jesus say we should always be concerned for "the least of these?" Many of the people in this category today would be people who don't have all the digital gear or the ability to take in the digital communications some of the more privileged of the church have.

They may be economically challenged; they may be older and not interested in or trained in digital communication methods.

The answer, of some churches, to this situation is that people who don't access all digital communication channels aren't part of the target audience the church wants to reach so it can grow, so that's just how it is. Other churches have cut from the budget print or other communication channels "only used by a few older people." Another church mocked the people in the congregation who aren't on Facebook with a "skit" designed perhaps to get more involved (though no instruction or help to do that was offered). These are not Christ-like responses.

To be obedient to our Lord, to care for the least of these, to be a servant to all, we cannot simply ignore people because they don't access the communication forms we prefer.

I read recently (forgive me I can't recall where) that this elitism in digital communications in the church is a kind of "reverse Reformation." The Reformation was all about access of the scriptures and church doctrine to all. A digital elitist attitude reverses that.

When this happens, then the next challenge to church communication follows:

Churches then quit printing as much as they need to

Less printing is a natural result of the of the decisions above (digital is best and less is more). Following these faulty premises, many churches quit printing essential information in the print pieces that connect people to the programs that could change their lives and remind them why they should come to church consistently. In other words, leaving out essential details or encouragement to attend spiritual growth opportunities in your print bulletin will result in a decline in church attendance. Remember, the church is not a priority for people today. You must remind them in every way possible why it is important and why they should attend.

AGAIN, PLEASE don't misunderstand me there. I'm not saying that churches should not use the tools of the web and technology. Digital tools, the web and all social media, should be used and used effectively (that challenge is for other articles) but they should be ***additions to church communication programs and should not take away from or be a substitute for the print communication programs in churches.***

You simply cannot get people to come to church and become involved with the ministries at the church by not telling people about them or telling people about ministry opportunities through channels they don't regularly access or through channels that aren't intended for the kind of message you must get across.

Print (and often lengthy print at that) is still the preferred and most effective form of communication today if you want to keep members and to grow your church.

Research to back up the importance of print

More and more studies are coming out on the effectiveness of print communications over digital, if you want a measurable response. It isn't just churches that were initially confused that the popularity of digital and social media equaled effectiveness. The advertising industry jumped into digital ads as the supposed driver of huge sales. It hasn't turned out as expected and there are now many studies out that discuss why the large amount of digital advertising has resulted in a disappointing response as compared to print. Below are three references to this. Effective Church Communications will be coming out with a more detailed report on *The Power of Print Over Digital Communications*, please check our website (www.effectivechurchcom.com) for notice of it. However, these three references are very instructive and along with them I've included some possible church applications:

#1 The 2015 Direct Mail Marketing Response Rate Report states that: *Direct Mail Outperforms All Digital Channels Combined by Nearly 600%*

Application to church growth and involvement: It isn't enough to notify people through an email if you want to get an increased attendance at a church event. Send out postcards in addition to digital notices if you want to get people to attend seasonal events or ministries at your church in addition to posting the notices on social media.

#2 Increased consumer preference for paper grows

Here are some statistics from a fascinating survey, "The Attractiveness and Sustainability of Print and Paper" conducted in July of this year that confirmed that not only do people prefer communications on paper, but that preference is growing. Here are some representative statistics from the study:

- 94% agreed that print and paper can be a sustainable way to communicate (compared to 72% in 2013).
- 79% agreed that reading from paper is nicer than reading off a screen (70% in 2011).
- 76% agreed that print on paper is more pleasant to handle and touch when compared to other media (68% in 2011).
- 76% agreed that paper is based on a renewable resource (65% in 2011).

Application to church growth and involvement: People prefer reading materials from paper. (Quick question—how many of you printed this out

to read it?) For other than brief announcements, consider brochures, flyers, informational papers, longer bulletins and bulletin inserts if you want people read them and act on the content in them.

From: <http://www.twosidesna.org/download/The-Attractiveness-and-Sustainability-of-Print-and-Paper-July-2016.pdf>

#3 Even in the digital world, people still like to read

Data from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism reinforce the notion that lots of people like to read in-depth journalism on mobile devices. In a study called "Future of Mobile News" last October, Pew found that 73% of tablet owners access long-form content either regularly or sometimes; 19% do so each day. The same overall total was true for phones, with 11% regular consumers

Those readers have healthy appetites. About 60% of the tablet users who access long-form [defined as 1,000 words or more] read two to three articles in a sitting, and another 17% read four or more. Often, the report found, they devour articles that they hadn't initially planned to read.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/columnist/2013/06/05/rem-rieder-longform/2389995/>

Analysis showed that while 85% of all web content is less than 1,000 words long, long-form content of more than 1,000 words "consistently gets higher average shares and significantly higher average links" than shorter content. In fact, as copy length increased, both social shares and links from other domains increased.

<https://copyhackers.com/2016/02/short-long-content/>

Application to church growth and involvement: Don't be afraid to have pieces that are longer than 500 words on your church website. This was a number that was very popular in the early "Less is More" days.

People want to and will read longer material if it is worthy of their time and effort. The content of Biblical teaching is worthy of your effort to put it up on your site. Don't underestimate the importance of the messages of your church and the need your people have for them.

Final challenging application to church communications

If you want to involve the members of your church that aren't attending and if you want to add new members from the community to your church, you need to increase the number and effectiveness of your communications. In addition to making the most of all the digital channels available to you, you probably need to be printing far more than you've done.

As the saying goes, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." If your current level of print communication isn't producing the results you want, considering adding pieces like postcard reminders and outreach, invitation cards, expanded bulletins with inserts and informational flyers. The Effective Church Communications website (www.effectivechurchcom.com) has many seasonal communications and well as year-round materials that will work well for you in outreach and as reminders. In addition, there are hundreds of articles and tips on how to make all your communications more effective.

Here at Effective Church Communications we've studied what has worked in growing, spiritually healthy churches for a long time and the result of that and our own study is our *Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing*. This is a plan that takes all the scattered communications of your church and puts them into a sequential, orderly plan that will enable you to take people from outside the church and with the 5 steps of INVITE, INFORM, INCLUDE, INSTRUCT, and INSPIRE you will help them become mature disciples of Jesus.

We have a book that discusses this in detail (*The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing*) and many articles and materials on our website about it, but to help you understand in practical ways what you need to do to communicate with your people so they will come back, attend church and grow in their faith, we're sharing the following overview.

Overview of the Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing is the Biblical and strategic foundation that will enable you to create all the communication materials you need to grow your church in numbers and your people in spiritual maturity.

This Overview isn't exhaustive in scope or application, but it's a useful start—enough to give you an overview of the quantity and purpose of the communications you need to create to reverse the decline in attendance at your church. It is an edited excerpt from the book *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing*, (available at amazon.com in paperback and on www.effectivechurchcom.com in e-book format.) The Effective Church Communications website will give you additional advice and help in each step.

Don't be overwhelmed by all the communication pieces covered in this overview

I'm about to present what can be seem like an overwhelming task for church communicators, especially for those of you who are struggling with staff cut-backs, inadequate budgets, churches with small church staffs, church staffs with staggering workloads—in other words—most church offices.

Your task demands in church communication, even in the best of times is very challenging. After reading this material, please don't think you must implement every communication piece suggested with a perfectly structured plan to move people step-by-step to Christian maturity one week after reading this book. That isn't essential or possible.

This material is designed to give you goals to strive for and every step you take will make the church communications ministry at your church more effective.

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing Overview are:

#1 INVITE

#2 INFORM

#3 INCLUDE

#4 INSTRUCT

#5 INSPIRE

For each step, I will:

- Label the step
- Define the task it is to accomplish
- Define the target audience it is primarily addressed to
- List the marketing strategy for that step
- List the ministry goals it is to accomplish
- List the communications that will accomplish this task
- Give additional notes on the implementation of this step

No step or no one communication piece stands alone; all of them work together to the one goal of fully fulfilling the Great Commission

All of them should help people take a step in their faith journey to mature discipleship. If any individual piece is to do more than look impressive and have a momentary impact, it needs a purpose bigger than that one piece. The most effective pieces build on what came before them, intentionally guide people to the next step towards discipleship, and reflect the church that created them. Try to keep this big picture in mind as you work on any part of your communication ministry.

Don't get distracted with design or creation concerns

As important as design and creation issues are, they are not the most important aspects of a church communication program. The non-essential importance of design is very hard for some people to hear, but from years of observing churches and the results of their communications, I know it's true. Great looks alone on a few pieces do not make a disciple-building communication program. Also, in social

media much of communication is text-based, sent and received on mobile devices where design isn't a concern.

In addition, on media channels where design matters, such as print or websites, tastes in communication design vary widely and just because you like something doesn't mean the people receiving it will. People are not wowed into the kingdom.

People do not make decisions to attend a church or come back to a church just because they are impressed with the design of your bulletin, outreach postcard, or web videos any more than you buy a car (or anything else) based on the most appealing advertisement. A great ad might catch your attention and get you into the showroom, but to buy a vehicle is a costly commitment and takes additional research and thought. No one buys a car or makes an eternal commitment for salvation based on an avant-garde image, a unique typeface, edgy or exciting design.

At the same time, be assured that good design, great images, layout, and especially well-used typography, can make an important contribution to the effectiveness of individual communication pieces. I love working on the design aspects of communication, but I know that what will help you reach your world and grow your people into Christian maturity is not my design skill—it is useful content.

There are many sources on the web that will help you with design from choosing software for publication creation to the details of image selection, typography excellence, and many related areas, but don't get distracted by the details of design skills and tools before you have a good grasp of the big picture of what is needed for your overall communication effectiveness. Once you understand all the communication pieces and processes that are necessary to lead your people to mature discipleship, you can go back and fine-tune your creation of the individual pieces.

Chart of The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing

Following is the overall chart of The Five Steps that visually represents all the steps and the various parts of them.

Following the chart, we'll then look at each step in more detail.

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing

to help churches create communications that will fully fulfill the Great Commission

TASK	Target Audience	Marketing Strategy	Ministry Goals	Key Communications Far from exhaustive, the practical tools that will help move people from one step to the next.
Step #1 INVITE	Unchurched people Visitors Community	See	Identify the Church Unchurched into the Church Become regular attenders Evangelism	Print & Digital Versions Identity pieces: logos, business cards, stationary, signage; Outreach: invitation cards, postcards, ads, door-hangers, tracts; Outreach support publications; Signage. Websites, emails, video, podcasts.
Step #2 INFORM	Visitors Regular Attendees Crowd	Sample	Personal Salvation Learn about the Church Join the Church Worship	Print & Digital Versions Bulletins & Bulletin Inserts; Visitor & Prayer Cards; Visitor & Member Communications; Gospel Presentations, Doctrinal & Denominational Literature; Church Overviews; Overall Church Newsletters. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking
Step #3 INCLUDE	Church Members Committed Attendees Congregation	Select	Participate in Church Events Experience Ministries beyond Sunday morning or main meeting Fellowship	Print & Digital Versions Age, life-stage program info & PR: children, youth, singles, seniors, etc. Ministry specific: Newsletters, brochures, calendars, event info and PR. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking
Step #4 INSTRUCT	Involved Members & Attendees Committed	Stay	Spiritual Growth and Maturity Biblical Training Small Group Participation Discipleship	Print & Digital Versions Training materials: for all age and life-stage groups; Teachers: manuals, support materials; Corporate devotional and Bible reading; inspirational reminders Small group: PR, lessons, support. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking
Step #5 INSPIRE	Leaders, Workers, Key Volunteers Church Staff: professional, bi-vocational & lay Core	Sell	Ongoing Service & Outreach Lifestyle & Church Ministry Consistent Giving Missions Involvement Ministry	Print & Digital Versions Volunteer & Staff: recruitment, training, affirmation; Equipping publications; Encouraging & Inspiring materials; Financial publications; Missions involvement and support. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking

Core Components of Effective Church Communications

- Based on a Biblical Vision: the Great Commission, Commandment, Goal, and Promise.
- Modeled after Church Growth Theory that is: progressive, structured, time-intensive.
- Informed by Marketing Theory: communication that is targeted, multi-channel, complete, repeated.
- Implemented using a variety of hardware and software, publication tools and tactics.
- Modified for and tailored to the denomination, location, size, culture, and budget of each church.
- Measures success by attendance, conversions, church growth, and changed lives.
- Accomplished by tangible publications, team effort, prayer, and trust in God for eternal results.

Overview of Step #1: INVITE

Task: The task is to invite people, to simply get them into the church, or to attend a church-sponsored activity or ministry. Your communications don't have to do or explain too much, just get folks there. The second task of inviting is to invite people to consider the Christian faith and Jesus.

Target audience: Unchurched people, visitors, your community.

Marketing Strategy: SEE and not only physically see your church, but see how it can be part of their life; see the church as a source of spiritual information, caring, the start of a spiritual journey. To SEE Christianity and Jesus truly, in historical reality and biblical truth.

Ministry Goals: Identify the church; bring the unchurched into the church, have visitors become regular attenders; have totally unchurched people check out the Christian faith via the web or social media. Evangelism.

Communications that INVITE people to your church include: Business and invitation cards, postcards, flyers, door-hangers, direct mail, printed material designed for the unchurched, the outreach-oriented parts of your website, the social media that goes along with or supplements it. Developing a logo and identity package is often a foundational step here.

Additional notes about Step #1: INVITE

When many church leaders and communicators think about church marketing, creating the communications described in this step to get people to attend the church or an event or ministry is usually all they consider. However, marketing, when used properly in a church setting, is always going on as you constantly need to inform people of and invite them to ministry and spiritual growth opportunities that will move people to the next step of Christian maturity. In our secularized world, people need to be constantly, winsomely, and clearly reminded of why they need to attend events or become involved in ministries that will help them mature in their Christian life. In other words, you need to do as much thoughtful internal marketing to invite church members to ministry events as you do external outreach marketing.

Effective Step #1 communications are not only products you buy

Impersonal, mass communications that you buy can be used periodically to cast a wide net, but the most biblical and effective invitations are ultimately personal. At the church, you can create your communications, train your people to be inviters, and then give them the tangible tools (invitations, postcards, invitation cards with the connecting details, website and social media content) that will help them connect their friends to your church.

To do that and carry out this step of invitation most effectively requires a **team effort in the church** with each part of the church involved in different ways:

The leaders cast a vision of why people should come to the church or ministry event.

The staff creates the communication pieces, including the website, as the foundation of information, plus the additional digital and print materials, plus the social media that will clarify the activities and help people connect with the events. They prepare the invitation pieces to give to the congregation to give out, mail out, or digitally share.

The congregation shares the communications. They are the ones who then take the invitations, postcards, emails, and other digital media to connect their friends and unchurched acquaintances with the activities going on in the church.

If you create or modify your invitation communications, they will be uniquely yours. If you create your own and use your people (they address, stamp, and send postcards to 5 friends) and not bulk mail as a delivery system, you'll also save lots of money that can be spent on feeding hungry children and other desperate needs in our world.

Shared involvement means shared spiritual growth

When you think of your entire church as responsible for outreach, this will help your congregation grow in their faith and obedience to Jesus. Remember, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, he didn't say, "This is only for church leaders, primarily senior pastors, the rest of you don't have to bother with sharing your faith." No! Every part of the church body has a responsibility to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

When churches become involved in this way (leaders provide vision, communication team creates the tools, and the congregation does the outreach) instead of sniping at the leadership of the church over a disappointing turnout for a seasonal event, everyone takes responsibility for attendance. When attendance is great, all rejoice. When attendance is not what was hoped for, everyone commits to more prayer and involvement next time.

In addition to invitations to events or locations, invite people to consider Jesus

One of the extraordinary things about the Internet today is that, even if people, for whatever reason, may be hesitant to come to your church, they might be willing to check out a website about the Christian faith and Jesus. Because of that I strongly recommend that on any outreach or invitation piece you create that, in addition to your invitation to the main event, that you also invite people to consider Jesus. Here is one way to do this:

Invitations to an Adult Bible Class

For one of the Adult Bible Classes my husband and I taught, we created some invitation cards for all the class members to give to their friends to invite them to the class. Our class name was "Live Life by the Book" and on the front of the card we had the typical info and website, on the back of the card we had this:

The most important thing when we Live Life by the Book is to know Jesus as our forgiver and leader!

To find out more about Him, check out these websites:

And then we had listed websites that give a clear presentation of the good news about Jesus.

We also had a link on the website home page, "The good news of Christianity" that had more links to websites for exploring the Christian faith.

We had these available every Sunday and encouraged our people to give them out to friends—people who might not ever come to class, but that's a minor issue if they meet Jesus through the website suggestions.

For a holiday outreach, make your invitation more than an event invitation

On the Effective Church Communication website, I have lots of ways you can invite people to investigate the Christian faith with the communications you give out during the holidays. One holiday that is especially conducive to this, and that people often ignore for its evangelism potential is Mother's Day.

But think about it—the importance audience to reach on that day isn't the Mothers. It is all the unchurched family members who will come that day to make Mom happy. Far better than a rose, a clear communication of what it means to trust Jesus as Savior and a plan to follow-up and continue a communication about the Christian faith with her loved ones, is the best gift you can give the Mothers in your church.

Any occasion, any holiday can be used as a time to invite people to your church and to explore the Christian faith. With a commitment to make the most of them you will greatly expand the outreach of your church.

Overview of Step #2: INFORM

Task: once you get people to the church or ministry event, you need to inform them in complete, clear, consistent, and caring ways about what is going on at the worship service or holiday church event they are attending. They also need to be informed about the big picture of what else is going on in the church and where this ministry or event fits into the overall program of the church. Always keep in mind that visitors most likely have no idea what else your church does outside of the event they are attending.

It is so easy to forget this, but because church staffs often do, between 70-90% of people who visit our churches on Sunday or who come to holiday or special church events do not return. We can change this by the communications we give them at this step.

As part of informing, you also need to invite people back and show them how the church can meet their needs. This requires that you gather information from them so your process of INFORMING them about the church can be more than a one-time message at their visit to the church.

Target Audience: Visitors, regular attenders, the Crowd.

Marketing Strategy: SAMPLE, you want people to sample your church—the Sunday service and various ministries, how your church celebrates holidays and special events.

Ministry Goals: Personal salvation; learn more about the church: join the church; Worship.

Communications that INFORM people include: church bulletins, church bulletin inserts, church connection cards, PowerPoint presentations, introductory brochures, visitor communications in both print and digital formats, visitor packets; overall church information and departmental sections (youth, children's, singles' and similar sections) on your website and in brochure format; follow-up special event handout materials. Additional digital media includes links to websites, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook invitations, and QR codes on outreach and visitor information.

Additional notes about Step# 2: INFORM

To repeat, this step is incredibly important because studies show approximately 70 – 90 percent of people who visit our churches do

not return. I believe the communications we give people (or that we don't give them anything) when they visit have a lot to do with this. There are four communications that are especially critical for all churches at this step. They are:

1. **The Church Bulletin**
2. **Connection Cards**
3. **The Church Website and other digital and social media links**
4. **Special Event Connection Information**

Let's look at each one in more detail. The Effective Church Communications website has many articles, books, training videos, and samples of these communications to enable you to implement the following suggestions.

The Church Bulletin

Think about it: in our post-Christian world, the first piece of Christian literature an unchurched person may see is your church bulletin. Often, she's never read the Bible, heard a Christian message, or read a Christian book. He knows nothing about how Christians express themselves. They walk into the church and are handed the bulletin. This is their introduction to your church, the Christian faith, and Jesus.

Scary thought, isn't it?

What does your bulletin say to them?

If it is filled with jargon, incomplete information about events that only long-time members understand, and if there is no order of service so visitors have no idea what is doing on, the visitor quickly assumes this is an insider club, they obviously don't belong, and they may not return.

If, however, your bulletin:

- Welcomes visitors
- Has a clear order of service and helps visitors understand each part
- Is friendly and relatively jargon free
- Lists events in ways that make sense and is inviting to everyone
- Has enough detail so anyone can show up for an event, ministry, or other learning experience without any more information than what is in the bulletin

- Encourages visitors to check out more about the church, staff, ministries and mission of your church through the church website
- Invites interaction, offers to pray for the visitor, and respond to questions through the Connection Card
- Has a brief explanation of what it means to become a Christian along with website links, email contact, social media links, and the phone number of a person to talk to if they want to find out more

If your bulletin does these things, the visitor will walk away with a much more positive view of your church and will be more likely to return. If they are traveling through town, even if you don't have the chance to connect with them on earth, your bulletin can enable them make an eternity-altering decision.

The bulletin is an underused, but extraordinarily powerful communication piece for evangelism

"The Advocate. . . when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment" (John 16:7-8).

This verse is a promise. The Holy Spirit is active in our world convicting people of their need for God. People without a personal relationship with Jesus **will come to your church. They will read whatever you give them.**

Church offices often complain that the congregation doesn't read the bulletin (which may or may not be true), but you will often find visitors pouring over it. They will take it home and read it later; they will look up websites and social media links mentioned in it if it promises answers.

It could radically change the return rate of visitors and their response to the Christian message if churches would create their bulletins with unchurched people and infrequent attenders in mind. We don't have to do extraordinary, expensive, extravagant things to get people to respond to the good news about Jesus and to grow in discipleship in the context of our church family—we simply must make the most of every opportunity we have to clearly communicate who Jesus is, who we are, and invite them to join.

It is difficult for me to stop talking about church bulletins, both because I believe passionately about what they can do for a church and because of what I have seen result in churches when they put some of this advice into practice, but this book is an overview of communications, not an

exhaustive treatment of any one piece. In addition, the ministry of Effective Church Communications has many more materials that will help you in practical ways make the most of your bulletin.

In addition to the Church Bulletin, Connection Cards are a VITAL link at this step

You can do the greatest job with Step #1: INVITE, and have lots of people come to your church or to a special event, but if people don't tell you they are there, you have no way to follow-up, no way to build any kind of continuing relationship with them. Connection Cards will help make that link between visitors and your church.

Unfortunately, though many churches print Connection Cards or have them as an attached tear-off on their bulletin, few churches use them effectively or follow up in ways that assure continued response. Connection Cards don't stand on their own as a communication tool in the same way the bulletin or website does. It is a piece of church communication that requires intentional, disciplined planning, creation, presentation to the congregation and immediate, consistent follow up for it to be successful. Connection Cards are one of the most challenging church communications because the work required to make the ministry with them effective is repetitive, boring, and seemingly unnecessary. But that work is also one of the most effective ways to grow your church in numbers and to pastor your people.

To get the largest number of cards turned in

It's easy to assume everyone knows they should fill them out and so the worship leader mentions them quickly in between songs. But it is impossible for visitors to do that because often everyone is standing, and the leader quickly goes on to the next song. Few cards are filled out and returned and most of them are from people with continuing prayer requests. These requests are very important and we don't want to diminish them in any way, but without intentional focus on getting the congregation to fill out the cards, while everyone is sitting down and able to write on them, you won't get much of a response from visitors.

From my personal ministry experience with them and the feedback of many who follow the advice from Effective Church Communications, intentional use of connection cards can make a huge difference in how many visitors return to your church and the involvement of your congregation in the activities of the church. In advising church planters

on how to grow their churches, I always emphasize that focus on and proper use on this one communication piece will make a huge difference in the numerical growth of your church.

Please check out the book: *Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people—little cards, big results*. This book gives you step-by-step direction on how to create, present, collect maximum numbers of cards, follow-up and overall use the cards for maximum effectiveness. It is available on amazon.com.

Your Church Website and social media—where you can say all the things you didn't have time to say at church

Websites are a wonderful tool to INFORM people about the church, not only before they attend, but after they have made a first contact with you. To make the most of your website in this way, pay attention to how national advertisers, TV shows, even your evening news use their website. For example, on the nightly news, the website will be referred to for expanded coverage of a topic, for links to more information or how to be involved in something that might be of interest to the audience. Through social media, by encouraging visitors and members to sign up for blogs, your church Facebook, Twitter and whatever else is new and used by your community is a great way to inform people of upcoming events and to continue an information feed.

Think of your church bulletin as a gateway to the online and social media content and interaction.

Your web and social media can continue the conversation you started in the church bulletin. For example, mention in the bulletin that your church has an upcoming event for children that is part of your overall children's ministry. Provide a link to the website, perhaps even with an extra incentive such as, "Link to our website about children's ministry and download our free PDF on 'Polite Children Are Happy Children'" or some other short topic that would appeal to people who may not realize the church has something for their kids and family.

You can ask questions in the bulletin that you answer on the website. For example, during the fall, you might say something like this: People say, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" but what does that mean? Check out our website for the history and reasons.

Be certain of course that your website has complete and inviting materials when they go to it and that there are links to the advertised areas clearly highlighted on the home page.

Social media—make them more than a token presence or don't do them

Today it's expected that churches have Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram and whatever the latest social media is in the same way that a few years ago, websites were something every church felt they had to have. Sadly, many churches slapped up a website or bought a template that was half-filled with boring, never updated text and wondered why their website didn't do all the great stuff it was supposed to. Going on a website with a flashy front page and little else of valuable information is like a date with an extremely handsome guy or beautiful woman who can only talk about themselves—impressive initially and a huge disappointment after five minutes.

Technology alone is not what is impressive. New technology is only a new channel with which to communicate. Giving people a new way to access your message, your content, is the point of new technology. Be sure that if you advertise a church Facebook page, or Twitter account, or whatever new thing that is current and popular with your audience, that there is relevant, up-to-date contact for them on these media. Be sure someone on the church communication team is actively involved with them and constantly updating them. If you don't do that and visitors check them out, your church will look silly, insincere, and your credibility will be damaged.

Remember mobile phone, tablet access

For every church, you need to make certain your church website has church information and schedules that are not only accessible through these devices but optimized for them. If you don't know if they are or not, ask a member of your church or youth group to access your website on their phone and tablet. If you spent a lot of money on a website with super fancy graphics driving it, you may be in for a disappointing surprise because some sites that use fancy graphics for navigation are impossible to navigate on a mobile phone.

If your web site isn't optimized for mobile phones, you need to do whatever you can to make them so. Especially if you have a younger congregation, much of their searching your church site for ministry information will be done on their phone. You can have the most

contemporary worship band ever, but if visitors can't navigate your website on their mobile phone, you've lost all credibility with that person.

If some of the previous material was confusing—don't worry about it. Every person on the church leadership or communication team doesn't need to know how to implement every communication tool available to churches. That's why the Lord put us in a body, with people of every age, skill and technology interest to help each other and to serve the Body of Christ. There is always something new, a new tool, social media, channel— the most important thing is to closely monitor what your church and audience uses and then either recruit or train people on your communication team to respond to it.

Work hard to fully inform current members

In addition to not informing visitors about what is going on when they first attend your church, typically, most church communication ministries drop off considerably at this step in communications to the church membership itself. The result is that you often hear from members of the congregation who attend little else than Sunday morning: "I didn't know that was going on."

We must first resist the urge to smack the person who said that or to yell, "But it was in the bulletin!"

There are many reasons why someone may not be aware of what you advertised, or thought you advertised. It's easy to forget that many people today work schedules that force some members to only attend one or two Sundays in a month—so if you only put something in the bulletin once or twice, they might not ever see it.

Perhaps you were in a rush and created announcements so quickly you used lots of church acronyms that don't make sense to anyone outside the church office. Maybe your church website hasn't been updated in six months, but the bulletin still says "go to the website for current youth event schedules." These are just a few of the reasons why what you think you communicated may not have been communicated about ministry events outside Sunday morning.

You must work just as hard to keep members informed as you do to make your church clear to visitors. It's often very difficult to do this because, unless you have a team doing communications, the overworked

church staff typically has time to get basic communications such as the bulletin, newsletter, website, and staff assignments done, but no time for anything else.

It is essential that your church form a communication team if you want to go beyond simply inviting people to your church and giving them the most basic information. In most churches, you need to increase the number of communications produced beyond what you are doing if you want to INFORM your church people enough for them to continue to grow in their faith. One or two overworked people in the church office, no matter how dedicated they are, can't do it all. I

have additional materials on church communications teams on the Effective Church Communications website and in the full version of *The 5 Steps* book.

Special events also require special informational communications.

Effective use of Step #1: INVITE, gets people to the seasonal or special event, but getting them there is not enough. If we want our outreach to result in more than a one-time visit, we must inform visitors about what is going on and about the church activities and opportunities outside the special event. We must:

- Intentionally give them additional information about the church
- Point them to where they can find out more
- Specifically invite them back to an ongoing service or ministry at the church

We must be proactive in these communications because the typical approach of most churches, when hosting special events (alternative Halloween celebrations, Easter children's or music events, Christmas plays, etc.) is often the unspoken assumption, that just because you host an event: "Folks will think we are a neat church and come back next Sunday and, if they have kids, they will bring their kids to Sunday School." This is a totally false and misleading assumption!

People in our post-Christian, unchurched culture, often have no idea what a church does on a typical Sunday morning or that something called "Sunday School" or "Promise Land" or "Kids Kove" or whatever you call it, exists. Nor do they have any idea what goes on there. When they come to the holiday or special event, you must give people detailed information on what else you do at the church on a regular basis and intentionally invite them to it.

Overview of Step #3: INCLUDE

Task: For people to grow in the Christian faith, they need to be included in more than Sunday morning. It is vital, if people are to mature, that the church communications actively work to include them in more than the worship service. At this step the church communications shifts from primarily external-focused communications and marketing to internal communications and marketing.

Target audience: Church members, committed attenders, the Congregation.

Marketing Strategy: SELECT, at this step you want people to select the church as their church; this is where they go on Sunday, this is the center of their church involvement.

Ministry Goals: Participate in church events, small groups, volunteer experiences, Bible and faith development classes for all ages, experience ministries beyond Sunday morning or the main meeting, Fellowship.

Communications that INCLUDE people consist of: parts of the bulletin, the overall church newsletter and ministry brochures, flyers, visitor information center materials, with the details about events repeated in print and online. Intentional communication to include also require expanded details on the church website and blog; continuous inclusive invitations, reminders, and details through social media. Age-appropriate materials are needed for each age group in the church, e.g. it isn't enough to do general materials to involve people in Bible education, you need different communications for children's Bible classes and for Adult Bible learning opportunities. Communications at this step must intentionally take people who have shown up for an event or regularly on Sunday to the next step of involvement. People will not grow to mature disciples if they only come to church on Sunday morning.

For example, when you do PR for small groups, additional communications needed at this step include: maps, small group descriptions, how to contact the leaders, what to do to participate. Be sure these materials are all readily available if you want to INCLUDE people in the ministries them instead of only informing people about them. Connecting details are essential to take people beyond the step of information to inclusion.

Web-supported calendars, reminder emails, all forms of social media, web-based explanations of programs and PR are also part of this step. Depending on the age and demographics of the subgroup you are working to include, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, the many new and changing services, and other small screen and social-networking forms of communication can be used effectively to include people into fellowship groups and church events.

It seems like a new method of digital connection is developed every week—you've got to be nimble and flexible for maximum church communication impact. Give them a try. Ask people from other churches what they use, what gets a response and try it. What works well for an individual church is often related to age, location, demographics, and is constantly changing. Don't be afraid to drop something if it doesn't work, or becomes outdated; be prepared to be surprised at how much fun and useful many of these can be.

Additional notes about Step #3: INCLUDE

There are 3 phrases that will stop, kill off, totally halt any attempt your church makes to include people in the ministries of the church. It's impossible to overestimate the damage they've done. Here they are:

The first most-deadly phrase that can kill off communications at this point is: "Oh, everybody knows."

They don't. To get your people growing spiritually, you must continuously communicate to them what the church office and staff knows, but visitors and even frequent attenders don't. You must constantly remind them about the ministries that can involve them in church life and lead them to Christian maturity. You must remind them or teach them if they are new in the faith why they need to be involved.

The second most deadly phrase at this point is: "Call the church office for more information."

They won't. People today are extremely busy, and even if someone does call the church office, chances are they will simply get voice mail and end up more frustrated than when they started.

Communications whose purpose is to INCLUDE people in church events must give all the information for people to make an initial connection in the first piece they see.

In practice, this means if you want people to sign up for something, give them all the details about the event and the direct email or phone number to sign up or the address where they are to show up in whatever your communication piece is: paper or digital. Don't require them to call someone at the church office to find out the specific time or location or to take the extra step to call and find out what person to call to sign up and find out where an event will take place. Never require a call to the church office for details after listing an event on the website. If you direct them to the website be sure you have all they need there.

The third and most current deadly phrase is: "It's on the website."

Chances are it isn't or it isn't updated. As was said earlier your website is a fantastic place for additional information, but you must make sure your information is complete and current before you routinely tell people to go to your church website.

Remind yourself—the church is usually not the number one priority in people's schedules today

You must make it as easy as possible for people to be included in events that will grow them in their faith. You cannot make it more difficult to show up for a church event than it is to decide to go to a movie or Starbucks. If people must take nonessential steps, jump through hoops, try to get information from a church office where no one answers the phone, or navigate through a website that hasn't been updated in months, or has too many clicks to get to the information desired, they won't bother.

In addition to not if people will know the details of time, location, etc., that will connect them with the activities in your church, please do not assume that people will know why they should bother to attend.

You must communicate the benefits of attending church events with biblical honesty

For example, most newcomers to the church, or even many longtime members, probably have no intrinsic, burning desire to be in a small group. People are very busy today and they have lots of options for their spare time. A notice or two in the bulletin, listing the benefits of being in a small group as "a time for intimate sharing and prayers" might not be appealing to someone who has never prayed in a group before and has no wish to do so.

If you want to involve people, you've got to work to find out what appeals to the audience you want to involve, not just what has meaning to you.

Continuing with the small group example, people were created for relationships, we know that "not good to be alone," is a truth about us from the days of creation. As I write this, social networking on computers and cell phones is a very big deal. Maybe instead of talking about time "for intimate sharing and prayers" to advertise a small group growth campaign, you might use as a theme something like: "Make the virtual, Real." or "Love your cell phone? Try a Cell Group!"

Maybe? I'm not sure if any of the above ideas would work, but at least try to bring the biblical reality you are trying to communicate—a need to be part of the Body of Christ—into the current cultural setting.

Try things, talk to people, and get feedback from the people you want to reach before deciding on a campaign theme. I'm not sure what will work in any specific campaign ahead of time, but I do know if none of the hard work of well-thought-out, complete, and repeated communications is done, no matter how spiritually valuable the ministry, you will not get the involvement you would have if you did the hard, detailed communication work necessary.

In addition to newcomers, no matter how “mature” some people in the church might be, they need detailed volunteer communications

The church is not part of the everyday culture and of people's lives as it was in the past where often such details were not necessary. Sadly, so often in churches, instead of church leaders realizing they failed their people by not providing them with the communication tools they need to successfully to connect with ministries and spiritual growth opportunities, leaders conclude that "people just don't care about spiritual growth or ministry service."

People do care and they care tremendously, but they need REPEATED easy-to-access, detailed communications online and in print to help them to connect with ministry tasks.

For example, you might need people to help with the children's ministry, but a vague announcement to "Call Miss Betty if you can help with children's ministry" will probably not get many responses. A well-thought out brochure, both in print and online, that gives an overview of the

program, features some of the people currently helping and shares interviews with them on why they love it, plus listing the specific needs of the ministry and commitment required (once a month? every week? time, day) and if a background check is required, for what jobs and who pays for it, are all important informational details if you want to involve members in ministry.

Don't deceive yourself and think you are communicating well if people aren't responding

Self-deception is so easy to do in our work in the church in the communication area and the way to make certain we aren't doing that is to measure your communication results. You need to plan your communications with accountability in mind. In the full-length book on the Five Steps there is a chapter on "Evaluation" that will give you specific suggestions on how to measure the success of your communications and what to do if you don't get the results you want. Don't ignore careful, prayerful evaluation and then complain if you don't get the results you want.

The next point is depressing, so prepare yourself

People, in general, do not trust, respect, or obey pastors or other church leaders in the same way they did in the past.

When I was growing up, if Pastor said you were supposed to be at an event, you were there. If Pastor said this program was important for your spiritual growth, you showed up at that event. Furthermore, if you did not show up, Pastor followed up and wanted to know why you weren't there. Most likely next week you were at the church event.

It is an entirely different world today and not necessarily a more pleasant one. But it is what it is. People today are authority indifferent at best and often totally without civility towards leaders who voice any opinion they don't like. I mention this not to moan and groan and talk about how awful it is, but to remind church communicators that you can't rely on your position or the Pastor's authority for people to respond to your invitations to church or ministry involvement.

Related to this general shift in attitude, I strongly recommend that you do not require commitment to any general church program (specific training programs such as the ones for Confirmation in the church or ministries such as Stephen's Ministry Counselors are different) before asking people

to attend. To require people to commit to 13 weeks of a Bible Study, especially if it is directed to new people or people unfamiliar with the church doesn't work. Not only because people don't trust you without trying out what you have to offer, but even if they do trust you, it is very difficult today to commit to anything for 13 weeks. Some marriages don't last that long—that's a sad reality—so don't be disappointed if people don't respond to your demands for unwavering commitment.

If you can get people to come six out of thirteen weeks if they've never been involved in a small group before is a great success. Celebrate any new involvement and it will grow over time.

No matter what your position in the church, you must work hard to communicate effectively, measure your results honestly, adjust if necessary, and consistently keep producing communications that will INCLUDE people in church events outside Sunday morning.

Overview of Step #4: INSTRUCT

Task: Once you INCLUDE people in events outside Sunday morning, you need to teach them the Bible's standards and life expectations if they are to grow in their Christian life and become mature disciples. They won't get it from the world outside the church. This intentional instruction in the Christian faith, in addition to the instruction in the Sunday morning sermon, is often lacking in churches today.

One of the reasons why study after study shows that people who profess to be Christians live no differently than people who are not Christians is because many of them have never been taught they ought to live differently.

People do not grow up in the faith and become mature disciples without intentional training and often this training requires a volume of Bible-based communication materials seldom shared today. We must reverse this trend if we want to grow our people into mature disciples.

Target Audience: Involved members and attenders; the Committed.

Marketing Strategy: STAY, you want folks to stay and grow as disciples.

Ministry Goals: Spiritual growth and maturity, Christ-like lives, Biblical training, small group participation, Discipleship

Communications that instruct people include: Invitations to, listing of, schedules of Bible-learning activities for all ages, Bible class outlines, teaching materials, take-home study guides, lists of verses, memory verse card materials, quizzes, adult and youth Sunday School quarterlies, teaching handouts, devotional reading suggestions, and journal materials. Web-based, in-depth discussion of class topics, reference materials, referral articles; web blogs on important topics, discussion and comments, question and answer opportunities. Web-based videos, podcasts, and extensive website linking to more resources for your congregation can be incredibly beneficial. Materials that motivate and encourage people to read their Bibles, study and attend events that will help them become mature disciples are necessary also. Social media can be used to remind and encourage and as a delivery system for Bible reading, lessons, links to resources.

Additional notes about Step #4: INSTRUCT

Dorothy Sayers sums up plight of Christians raised in post-Christian culture and our imperative to correct it:

“It is worse than useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to take their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously. It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practice it. The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ. . . . Theologically this country is at present in a state of utter chaos established in the name of religious toleration and rapidly degenerating into flight from reason and the death of hope.”

— Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos? Why Christians Must Choose Either Dogma or Disaster*

Sayers wrote that over 60 years ago in England during the days that C.S. Lewis was teaching and broadcasting on the radio. The current state of illiteracy in Biblical learning today would most likely be beyond her comprehension.

People must have tangible, printed, digital, and online-accessible material about the basics and advanced Bible-based teachings to grow in Christian maturity and for them to have a reason to attend church over the latest media or sports event.

Many churches bemoan the lack of Biblical, doctrinal, and denominational knowledge in church members today, but casual churchgoers aren't going to get it on their own. Simply attending Sunday services with an uplifting message and great music seldom grows mature believers. Even in churches that have the joy of a Bible-based priest or preacher, cannot grow believers to mature disciples with 30 minutes a week of training. It's difficult to retain anything of value, let

alone matters of eternal significance, in that amount of time, if you are unchurched or a believer with no Bible background.

Bible study notes may be boring to produce, but they can be life-changing. Putting them on the website in addition to printing them is extra work, but adds more opportunities for learning. People can review the notes online. If you encourage people to download, share, and use the materials in their own teaching, you provide another opportunity for spiritual maturity for your people.

Communications need to be created that help ALL the people in your church realize that instruction in the Christian life that will help each person grow to discipleship maturity is not an optional activity for the super-spiritual only. This is the life-blood for building up all believers to Christian maturity and is essential for believers who want to be obedient to their Lord.

Apologetics isn't just for the unchurched

Apologetic training on the basics of defending the Christian faith and understanding why you believe what you believe is not only important as an evangelism tool but is also essential to give people the confidence they need in their Christian faith to enable them to share it and trust it when they or their friends have questions.

It's hard to be a confident Christian who wants to share your faith if you are afraid someone will ask you a question like, "How is your Bible different from any other religious writing?" or "How can you say Jesus is the only way to God?" A class on how we got our Bible, or why Jesus is the only way to God, with step-by-step handouts and website references for more study, can be a life-changing and disciple-making experience for your church members. You must equip your people to answer these questions for themselves and their friends if you want to do your duty as a leader in the church. It's exciting to see how people increase in the courage to share their faith when they know they can trust it to answer hard questions.

This step must be intentionally multi-channel

Some people, who may not sit still to read their Bible, may listen to a series of podcasts about the Bible or audio version of the Bible itself. Church-produced videos and podcasts, which can be extremely easy and

inexpensive to do today, and can be shared on a church website and can provide expanded teaching opportunities.

Christian radio provides teaching 24/7 from extraordinary Bible teachers and is available today through multiple delivery devices from phones to computers. Most people are listening to something on their car radios and MP3 players—encourage them to make the most of this time by using it to grow in their faith from the teaching available on Christian radio and teaching websites and podcasts. Recommend links for them to listen to when exercising, walking, or working at tasks where they can listen.

Overview of Step #5: INSPIRE

Task: Communication at this step goes beyond the "feel good" aspects of inspiration to inspire people with a passion to reach out to a lost world and to live lives of unselfish service and devotion to Jesus. At this step, inspiration also applies to inspiring members of various ministries, such as small groups, to reach out and invite friends to join them in a ministry.

Target audience: Leaders, workers, key volunteers; church staff, professional, bi-vocational, and lay; Core.

Marketing Strategy: SELL—at this step you want people to be actively sharing their faith with others by acts of service & mission. You want them invested in the church and showing it by the sharing of their time, talents, and treasure.

Ministry Goals: Ongoing service and outreach, life-style and church ministry, mission involvement, Ministry.

Communications that inspire include: The brochures, web entries, blogs, lists and flyers that form the tangible, touchable, communication instructions of how to get involved in a ministry. Social media can capture photos, share experiences and prayers and encourage involvement. For example, people need to know the details such as these:

- How to help at the Rescue mission, tasks, times, what to bring, what you will do
- Where to deliver what is needed at the Women's Center, list of needs, directions to deliver them.
- The schedule for the Habitat for Humanity builds, skills needed, work expectations

These kinds of communications link inspiration with action. Your church might have the best of intentions to reach out or help, but if you don't create communications that turn intention to reality, you don't help anyone.

Communications that inspire can also include things like a refrigerator magnet created by from a Sunday School class teacher and given to class members that reminds them every time they open the refrigerator with this message: "Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

Web-based ministry and volunteer opportunities and links also fit in here. Especially important here are volunteer manuals, brochures, job descriptions, the materials that detail how people can become involved in a ministry and what is expected of them.

Additional notes about Step #5: INSPIRE

One very important thing to remember at this step is to not take people's understanding of church volunteer and ministry tasks for granted. If you grew up in the church, you know without even thinking about it, what it means to do all the jobs in the church. However, if your church has followed the Lord's command to reach your world, you may have many new members without earlier church experience, who have no idea what it means to be an usher, or a deacon, or a Sunday School teacher or how to do any of the ministry jobs that seem obvious to long-time church attendees.

Creating the materials to educate and motivate untrained volunteers and all the other communications needed to make this step effective is a huge job. Creating job descriptions, volunteer manuals, is daunting. Once created, then to put them in a variety of forms including print and on the website, can be overwhelming. Creating the database and administrative support needed to keep them updated is also time-consuming.

This is a lot of work, but these tasks are vital if we are to "equip the saints to do the work of the ministry."

Now you know what to do—the challenge is how to do it

As you look over the steps in this overview and review all the communications on the 5 Step Chart, it is easy to become discouraged—there is so much to do in our church communication ministry if it is to truly be a tool to stop the decline in church attendance and to turn it around so your church is growing in numbers and your people more involved in the spiritual growth opportunities in your church.

But what an exciting task! What a great challenge! Think about it—what you do will literally change the earthly lives of people in your communities for good and their destinies forever.

Yes, there is a lot to do, but you can do it. Start wherever you are, day-by-day tackle one task, improve or start one communication piece and in a shorter time than you imagine, you'll have made great changes.

Let me close with a selection from the book, *Devotions for Church Communicators*. I read over this one for times when I get tired and it encourages me and I trust it will encourage you in the great work you are doing to get your people back to church.

How to really change the world

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

(Matt. 7:24-27)

The story is told of how Steve Jobs, the president of the new and struggling Apple computer company, enticed John Scully, then president of Pepsi, to come to work for him.

“Do you want to spend the rest of your life peddling sugar-water?” Jobs asked Scully. “Or would you like to come and help change the world?”

Scully came to Apple and though they built a computer empire, it ultimately betrayed both of them and they were ousted from the corporation, though Jobs eventually returned. They gave their lives to a cause that may not have been built on sugar-water, was literally built on sand.

Sand—the silicon chips that power the computers that run more and more of our lives—that’s all they are. And if we don’t have a reason for using them that transcends the power in that box, our lives are built on nothing but crumbling sand.

But we do have a different reason for doing what we do with computers. We’re doing our work, our church communications, for the kingdom of God. We may not have the most up-to-date equipment, we may not have the time to learn all the programs we should, we may feel like what we produce is never as good as it could be—but we do it for glorious reasons. Our structure may be a bit rickety at times, but the foundation is solid.

Because of the communications you create, lonely people will feel welcome in church when they see the cheerful message and graphics in your bulletin; hungry people will be fed because your brochure explained a food drive well; birthdays will be remembered and people will feel they count for something because you carefully entered the names into

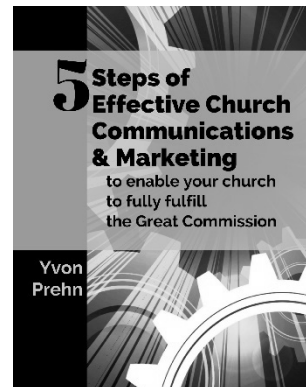
databases and printed out calendars. And sometimes, whether in a brochure, or newsletter, or web page, you'll clearly communicate the message of the gospel and the destiny of another soul will be changed for eternity.

Don't be afraid to work hard, to be excited and passionate about your work—you aren't working for sugar-water or sand, but for a kingdom that can never be shaken.

The 5-step overview material above is from the book, *Five Steps of Church Communications and Marketing*, by Yvon Prehn. The complete book has additional chapters on Discipleship, Marketing, Strategy, Characteristics of Church Communications, Evaluation and Endurance in Ministry.

It is an essential guide for a truly effective and comprehensive church communication ministry at your church. The book is available in e-book

format from www.effectivechurchcom.com and in paperback from www.amazon.com





About Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications is a ministry that provides training, templates, resources, and inspiration to help church communicators fully fulfill the Great Commission. The hub of our ministry is our website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Our approach to church communications includes more than design and communication construction how-tos, though we have lots of them. It includes foundational, biblical teaching related to communications, communication leadership, and church communication teams. We constantly remind church communicators that we have been entrusted with the words of eternal life and the eternal destinies of people depend on how well we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. For every communication piece, you not only get an easy-to-use templates and design tips, but a reminder of where this communication fits into bringing people to Jesus and helping them mature in their faith.

Though we work hard to stay current with technology, we value and attempt to teach timeless communication skills and principles. The majority of our training has application in every communication channel from print to podcasts.

We believe churches of every size, from tiny house churches to mega-churches benefit from clear, effective communication and we strongly emphasize that churches be who they are in their communications to their unique congregation and to the community they are called to reach. We strongly encourage churches to study their people, set goals, evaluate response to communication projects, consistently and clearly communicate based on who they are and where they are, rather than copy the latest mega-church or marketing trend.

We do not allow, encourage, link to, or promote, in any way, irreverent, profane language or snarky, cynical approaches to church communication or in the discussion of it. We serve a holy God and we seek in all we do to walk worthy and communicate a worthy message that reflects our Lord.

We strongly believe church communicators, of any age, from any size church, who use any software, with any skill level, can create incredible communications and can help and encourage each other.

We have ways (and are working on more) where church communicators can share and interact through our website, including our Great Idea Swap.

Though we encourage church communicators to pour their hearts, minds and souls into the hard work of communicating the words of eternal life, we are constantly aware that our words will only accomplish eternal results because of His blessing of them and His working through them of our eternal God.

Please check out www.effectivechurchcom.com and join us in the great adventure of sharing the words of eternal life!



About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of Effective Church Communications and of www.effectivechurchcom.com. For over 20 years she taught church communication ministry, skills, and strategy at seminars, conferences, and national conventions all over North America.

She is now at home in Ventura, California where she writes and creates online training materials to equip, inspire, and encourage church communicators.

Through most of her adult working life, Yvon has worked in communication ministry as a writer and teacher. She was a newspaper reporter and religion writer for the Colorado Springs SUN for nine years. When desktop publishing was first invented Yvon was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for numerous Christian ministries in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at Compassion International and Young Life International.

Yvon is the author of many books, including the first book out on desktop publishing, *The Desktop Publishing Remedy*, published by David C. Cook in 1994. She has written for many Christian magazines and was the communication columnist for *Christian Computing Magazine* (now *Ministry Tech*) for over 20 years. Her recent books (available at amazon.com) include *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing*; *Connection Cards, grow your church, pastor your people, little cards, big results*; and *Devotions for Church Communicators*.

Yvon has a master's degree in Church History and has done additional graduate work in theology and communications. She taught high school English and was an adjunct professor in church history at Regis University.

In addition to her formal experience in these areas, Yvon gets the opportunity to practice church communications in very practical

ways. She and her husband Paul worked in many areas of ministry in the church, including single adult ministry, adult education, and small group ministry. Yvon serves as a Bible teacher, as well as creating many of the church communications and marketing materials, both in print and online, for the various ministries she and her husband work with.

Yvon's seminars, plus her written and web-based materials, have helped thousands of people in Christian ministry and churches maximize their communications and enabled them to use them to help their churches fully fulfill the Great Commission.

To contact Yvon Prehn:

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Training site, blog and podcasts:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

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<http://www.facebook.com/EffectiveChurchCommunications>

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LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/yvonprehn>

End notes, Reprint Information, Resources, etc.

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I would appreciate you linking to the website, www.effectivechurchcom.com, if possible. PLEASE let your friends know about our ministry of helping church communicators and the resources we have for them.

Interview info:

If you would like to interview Yvon Prehn on any of the topics in this publication or any topic related to church communications for either print or other media, I'd be happy to chat—contact me through yvon@effectivechurchcom.com. I have done extensive radio work, some television, and am comfortable with unscripted interviews, call-in, and talk formats.

Additional resources, training and church communication instruction:

The website: www.effectivechurchcom.com has hundreds of articles, videos, podcasts, and additional resources to help you grow as an effective church communicator. The website has free materials and materials available to members only,

Effective Church Communications also has books for church communicators available at www.amazon.com in print and digital formats.

Citation note:

Some of the material here appeared in earlier versions of articles in my online newsletters or other publications, my misc. books and reprints, or on my website, www.effectivechurchcom.com. I'm always advising church communicators of the importance of repetition and I repeat key articles, advice, and key communication teachings in many ways.

Scripture versions and citations:

In most of my communications, unless otherwise noted, Bible verses are from the New International Version. Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Comments, corrections, questions, suggestions for additional articles, or information to help church communications etc. please send to yvon@effectivechurchcom.com

And may the Lord give you strength, joy, wisdom, and peace as you serve Him in church communications ministry,

Yvon Prehn
Ventura, ca