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5 Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing

Introduction

We serve a great God—the creator of heaven and earth. We have a great salvation—paid for by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and freely offered to all who believe in him.

We have extraordinary tools to communicate this message with computers in church offices today that are more powerful than NASA had when they put a man on the moon. We have incredible people creating church communications in print and online.

So why is the church losing ground?

Not a week goes by without another study or national news story about the declining of attendance in Christian churches, the growth of the numbers of people who don't believe in anything, and the celebration of aggressive atheists whose books attack the Christian faith. Even more discouraging are the studies that show many Christians no longer believe Jesus is the only way to God, that the Bible is not a source of objective truth, and whose lives are little different in their moral practices than those of the world around them.

Maybe the church deserves this. If we communicate that the Christian faith is about attending a multi-media production on Sunday morning designed to make you feel good about yourself and teach you how to live your best life now, if its primary concern is the health and wealth of its members as it ignores a world of pain and desperate need, maybe it ought to fade.

But that is not what the church is about. The church is the Body of Christ, our risen Savior and returning Lord. The church was left with the mission to share the true, uncompromising message that Jesus, by his resurrection from the dead, proved he is the only way to God. Jesus left his church with the command to share this message and to make disciples who live it.

That is the message of the church. To help you communicate it clearly and effectively is what this book is about. We can reverse the decline—we can grow our church in numbers and our people in discipleship maturity. We simply need to follow the biblical plan.

The Five Steps gives churches an all-encompassing communication plan to enable them to fully fulfill the Great Commission

Jesus told us what and how to communicate when he said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

This is our Great Commission. Please notice that it isn't an either/or statement. We are to “go” AND “make disciples” AND “baptize them” AND “teach them to obey everything” Jesus commanded. It isn't until we do *all* these things that we've fully fulfilled the Great Commission. The purpose of this book and The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing is to help you do that. For purposes of simplification, throughout the book, I've combined terms and define fully fulfilling the Great Commission as these two actions:

- To go into all the world, or to introduce people to Jesus
- Make disciples, or to grow believers to Christian maturity

These two statements are the goal and measure for success of the Five Steps. Helping you do these two things through your church communications is what this book and the ministry of Effective Church Communications is all about.

Keep fully fulfilling the Great Commission as your primary communication goal

Good looks, expert use of current technology, cutting-edge design are all tools subservient to this one goal. A flashy, great-looking church outreach piece, the envy of all your peers and that brings people in on Sunday, is not the ultimate goal. A website that takes advantage of every new technology combined with the newest social media is not the ultimate goal. These communication projects might be part of it, but success in one communication piece does not make an effective church communication program.

An effective church communication program is an overall refocusing of the entire communication program of the church to not only accomplish one goal such as creating a successful piece to bring people into the church, ***but structuring the entire communication program to create sequential, intentional communications that help people meet Jesus and then grow to mature disciples.***

Don't worry—this is not a pitch for an expensive, complex system of communications. Effective Church Communications can be accomplished with almost

no money or very little money. It works for church plants, mega-churches, and everything inbetween.

As you'll see as you study this plan, it has much more to do with cumulative faithfulness in the little things of many prayerfully and thoughtfully created communication pieces in a variety of formats, in print and digital, than in the difficult or expensive creation of one or two showy or cutting-edge technology projects.

Effective Church Communication goes beyond Sunday morning

This a radically different approach to church communications because many churches, when they realize that they need to do more in reaching their world, focus primarily on materials that are designed to get people to come to church on Sunday or to a special event at the church. The colorful, glossy, mass-produced postcards and social media campaigns are an examples of this. These can be useful, but in only a limited way.

Their help is limited because they only help a church *start* to obey the Great Commission. Through colorful PR campaigns and targeted mailing lists they do bring folks in on Sunday mornings. It might seem like this is THE successful way to do outreach—they do produce some new visitors. But attracting even a large number of visitors on Sunday or to a holiday event does not fully fulfill the Great Commission, which has at its core, the command ***to make disciples and teach them to obey all Jesus commanded***. Jesus did not allow for incomplete evangelism, for the far-too-often church practice of satisfaction with Sunday attendance and expecting nothing more from the majority of attenders.

It goes beyond adapting the latest technology

There are many reasons why your church may or may not want to adapt a certain technology, but effective communication and marketing that fully fulfills the Great Commission doesn't ignore technology. It rests on a Biblical foundation beneath all the changes that come in technology.

At one time printed books were a radical way to share the gospel message and Christian publishers are now scrambling to publish books on how to use social networking and websites for church communication ministry. That's great as we are encouraged by the Apostle Paul to "be all things to all people that we might win some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

However, the process I want to share with you in this book is useful no matter what technology is used. We can be certain that what is the latest and greatest tech tool today will be outdated shortly. Because of that, to focus too intensely on one technology and to think that this new, great technology will be the communication salvation of your church is not a wise approach.

I recently read a book that stated that every church must use a certain technology (I'd rather not be too specific so as not to embarrass the author). In addition, the book forcefully stated that the technology should be used on a iPhone. I'm not certain where the author lived, but in the laid-back community I

live in I'm not sure how many people my church is trying to reach have iPhones and how many of them are desperately seeking spiritual advice with them. It's not that the technology recommended might not work for some churches in some locations, but I imagine that even for those who do rush to it, they will find it has limited success as *the* communication solution for the church.

A focus on fully fulfilling the Great Commission and using whatever tools you have available is a much better approach. If you apply what I'll teach you in this book in a consistent and thoughtful way, you won't experience the roller-coaster ride many churches are on where "This is the great technology that will reach people!" and then the next year it's, "No! This is what will bring young families into our church!" Focus on the task; pick up and lay down tools as needed.

The Great Commission is not an easy command to fulfill.

There are many factors that contribute to churches not fully fulfilling the Great Commission. The Five Steps and the lessons related to church communications are only one part of fully fulfilling the Great Commission.

Even well-produced communications can't help if the people in your church don't want to grow as a church or in personal spiritual maturity—as some pastors have sadly shared with me. But if you and your people want your church to grow in numbers and in spiritual maturity, an expanded view of the place of church communications and a plan to put them to use in fully fulfilling the Great Commission is essential for your success. ***You can't grow a church without effective communication.***

Also, without good communication disciple-making is impossible to do once a person commits to Jesus as savior.

Disciple-making requires a large amount of tangible information be communicated in a sequential manner. Disciple-making takes time. Disciple-making takes repetition. Few churches today are intentional about creating communications in print and online that build believers in the faith and consistently communicate a process to develop disciples.

Even churches who spend large amounts of money on outreach materials seldom spend the time and communications work needed to get people into maturity-producing programs. The lack of maturity of the average Christian in the pew is evidence of the lack of disciple-building communications.

We can't stop in our communication process until we have developed mature disciples who are able to share their faith, live their faith, and lead others to Jesus.

We've established the needs in church communications. Let's now look at a solution that will enable you to:

- Approach every aspect of your church communication program with the Bible as your standard and guide

- Create timeless communications, where the principles can be applied no matter what the technology
- Create the communications by your church staff within your budget, or no budget
- Walk worthy as disciples and reflect Jesus in all your communications
- Enable all of your communications to work towards fully fulfilling the Great Commission
- Do it all in a practical, cost-effective, and sequential way

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication & Marketing will accomplish these goals.

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication

The Five Steps of Church Communication and Marketing, each of which is composed of a variety of communications in print and online formats, to move people from outside the church to mature discipleship are:

#1 INVITE

#2 INFORM

#3 INCLUDE

#4 INSTRUCT

#5 INSPIRE

This is a unique approach to church communications for most churches, to think of their communications in a sequential, progressive way that works towards the goal of fully fulfilling the Great Commission. This way of approaching church communications consists of more than quick tips, snazzy schemes, and one or two impressive pieces. As stated earlier it is based on the Bible as standard and guide in both our motivation for effective church communications and in the way we carry it out.

This is not an old-fashioned, out of touch, anti-technology response. I LOVE technology. I blog, tweet, podcast, build and modify websites, and can out-tech, out-geek, and out-sci-fi-trivia most of my relatives and friends a third my age.

But as much as I love technology, I love Jesus and his Word more. It saddens me that we aren't telling Jesus' story well enough so more people don't want to know him. To help us all tell that story with integrity and fidelity to God's Word is the purpose of my ministry and this publication.

It's important to take time to read this foundational book before you jump into the nuts and bolts of the many how-to materials available through my ministry and on my website www.effectivechurchcom.com. Implementing effective church communications can be overwhelming. But implementation makes much more sense if you have a goal, a reason to do the practical work. That's what this book will give you.

My hope is to help you get your vision clear before you work to implement anything. If you don't have a vision for the scope and potential of church communications, you'll simply continue to create one communication project after another that might look good, or that will accomplish a short-term goal, but won't accomplish the core goals of the church—to help people come to know Jesus as Savior and to grow to maturity in him.

I'm sure you want those things to happen, but you may wonder: will this work for my church?

These Five Steps work with any church growth program, denomination, tradition or ministry within churches

Each of your churches has a mission statement, target audience, and ministry system. The Five Steps do not replace any of them. The Five Steps are **a method** to help you reach the specific mission goals of your church in the particular area God called you to reach.

I've seen how each of these Five Steps can easily tie in with the various models of church growth popular today including the five steps of Christian growth in the Purpose-Driven model, the Willow-Creek model of Christian growth, and other spiritual maturity systems in Protestant denominations, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. It not only works with church growth models, but missional models, and church planting models. I have seen these principles successfully applied in every imaginable church size, from house churches to mega-churches, and in many denominations as I have traveled and taught it to thousands of churches all over North America.

I do want to give credit where it is due, and the Purpose-Driven Church (along with Debbie Fields cookies, a story explained in another section) was the inspiration for this church communication system, but its application extends far beyond the initial inspiration. The only requirement for this system of church communications to be useful to you and your church is a desire for your church to be obedient to the Great Commission given to us by our Lord Jesus and a desire to fully fulfill it.

Beyond church growth overall, The Five Steps are a way to grow ministries within the church

In addition to providing a method for your church to accomplish its overall mission, The Five Steps can work within various ministries of any church to help each ministry become effective. They describe a process that moves people from their first invitation to a ministry, to learning about it, getting included in it, receiving instruction in it, and then becoming inspired to invite others. From increasing church service attendance overall to becoming involved with small groups, or any spiritual growth ministry, this system is useful for the growth of any church-related program.

In addition to working well for programs within the church, the basic principles work well for nontraditional churches. House churches, missional churches—no

matter what the name or system—every church needs to communicate. Every church's primary goal is to move people from being strangers to Jesus to becoming his disciples. The Five Steps are scalable in that you can apply them from little churches and home groups to large churches, as my pastor husband and I have personally experienced in a variety of ministry settings.

My personal motivation for making The Five Steps widely useful

I've worked hard to make the system useful to a variety of churches and church traditions. I've done this not only because the people in my seminars and interacting on my website over the past many years have been from every imaginable church group and I've come to know, appreciate, and love fellow church communicators from many traditions, but because it's part of my DNA.

I'm the daughter of a Mennonite mother and Catholic father; an army brat who, in the course of moves from coast-to-coast in the U.S. and living in Hawaii and Japan, attended many churches of varied denominations. I've taught at a Catholic high school and a Jesuit university. I have a master's degree in church history in addition to having done graduate work in communications and at an evangelical seminary.

I worked for two interdenominational, international Christian organizations and was a religion reporter at a secular newspaper. I'm married to a formerly Presbyterian, formerly Baptist, sometimes bi-vocational pastor. I attend an ECO Presbyterian Church, though I periodically attend Episcopal services and Catholic mass to satisfy my soul's hunger for liturgy. As previously mentioned, I interact with people from many denominations in my seminars and through my web-based materials. Because of this wide variety of church experiences, I often refer to myself as a walking ecumenical council.

I am not dismissing and do understand the valid and important doctrinal distinctive of denominations, but for the purposes of fully fulfilling the Great Commission, Jesus' prayer in John 17 that we might all be one is my prayer for us all, no matter where our church home, as we seek to fully fulfill the Great Commission the Lord gave us all in our communications.

How this book will help you build a communication structure that will work to fully fulfill the Great Commission

After this Introduction is a chart of the Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing.

Though this chart is the foundational and organizing construct for Effective Church Communications, it is not a foundation that was hastily constructed. It took over a decade of work in church communications ministry for the basic concept of The Five Steps to be born, quite a few more years to take shape and it is a constant work in progress to build a structure of solid communication training on it. The chart is a summary of it. You can copy it, pass it on, use it however is helpful.

Chapter 2: Discipleship

This chapter on discipleship is important because although we all know we should be about the Great Commission, it's easy to forget the key place of disciple-making. It is only when we make disciples that we fully fulfill the Great Commission. Discipleship isn't a little side-issue for the serious folks in the church. It is Jesus' command for all believers and the essential foundation for effective church communications. As you will see, it is also an a biblical way to grow a church and sustain church growth.

Chapter 3: Marketing

Some church people are genuinely concerned about marketing and wonder about the appropriateness of marketing in the church. This is a valid concern and an important one to address. This chapter presents a biblical view of respectful marketing and provides biblical and practical examples of appropriate marketing in the church.

Chapter 4: Inspiration and Integration

Though I'd been teaching church communications for many years and had been involved in disciple-making ministries most of my Christian life, I did not integrate communication creation and disciple making until a Purpose-Driven Conference and Debbie Fields cookies inspired me to integrate them. Sometimes it helps to understand a system if you know the genesis of it. This chapter explains how The Five Steps came together.

Chapter 5: Overview of The Five Steps

Though the rest of the book, the training website, www.effectivechurchcom.com, and my entire ministry fleshes out The Five Steps, this chapter gives an overview of them. For each step you'll learn:

- the **Tasks** that each step will accomplish
- the specific **Communications**, in print and online that comprise that step
- **Additional Notes** about the implementation of that step

Chapter 6: Strategies

Though each step accomplishes different tasks through different communication pieces on the road to fully fulfilling the Great Commission, the wise use of selected strategies will make each step more effective.

The strategies presented include:

- Strategy #1: Create multi-channel communication
- Strategy #2: Divide your communication team into two production levels
- Strategy #3: Always be who you are, where you are
- Strategy #4: Don't let money be a determining factor
- Strategy #5: Do not confuse irreverence for relevancy
- Strategy #6: Make the most of seasonal events

Chapter 7: Characteristics

Any meal, from gloppy potatoes and mystery meat, to a gourmet picnic feeds you, but the characteristics of the food and how it is served make a huge difference in what they reveal about the server and how we respond to the food. It's the same with church communications. For our communications to be welcome and tasty to hungry souls, they need to be:

- Congruent
- Complete
- Caring
- Consistent

Chapter 8: Evaluation

Church communication is a demanding task with eternal results. How do we know if we've been successful or not? How do we know what makes a good communication piece worthy of the time and effort that go into it?

Unfortunately far too often church communication value is determined by uninformed opinion. This chapter recommends that we begin to objectively measure the effectiveness of our church communications and provides suggestions on how to do that.

Chapter 9: Practical Endurance

By this time you should be inspired to create effective church communications, but this final chapter reminds us that inspiration alone doesn't accomplish anything. We have to turn our inspiration into endurance by the daily, weekly, practical creation of effective church communications.

Afterwards: Implementation Advice

I can give you great ideas, strategy, and challenges, but you need to turn these into real communications that touch people. This section has some suggestions and advice on additional resources.

This book is a road map, but there is more to the journey

There is so much to learn and do in church communications, no one book could attempt to cover it all. In this book my goal is to give you a motivation, framework, and purpose for your church communications, but I don't want to leave you solely with ideas and inspiration. The next step is the website www.effectivechurchcom.com which has many practical, this-is-what-you-can-do-today-to-make-a-difference-today resources and information.

We've got a huge task, but I believe we can reverse the decline of the church, if we communicate effectively by keeping our eye on our North Star and focusing all our communication efforts to fully fulfilling the Great Commission.

We can do this—let's get to work.

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, social media, 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 media
Step #3 INCLUDE	Church Members Committed Attenders 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 media
Step #4 INSTRUCT	Involved Members & Attenders 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 media
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 media

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