



*in a world of websites
and social media....*

Are Printed Bulletins Still Needed in Church?

**YVON
PREHN**

*In a world of websites and social
media.*

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

By

Yvon Prehn

From

Effective Church Communications

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

©copyright 2012, Yvon Prehn, all rights reserved
ISBN-13: 9781479254842
ISBN-10: 1479254843

Effective Church Communications
36 Whitman Ct.
Ventura, CA 93003

Churches, Christian ministries, and individuals have my permission to quote or reprint whatever you want from this book without additional formal permission. Please include this citation: *Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?* by Yvon Prehn, <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>.

If you want to publish articles in church, denominational, mission or other websites, blogs, or any other publications, you may do so without cost or additional permission, with the same citation as the one above. If possible, link to my site and send me notification—but if you don't have time, don't bother (I understand stressed ministry schedules).

For situations where you need formal permission, interviews with Yvon Prehn, or information about the ministry of Effective Church Communications, email: yvon@effectivechurchcom.com.

Cover design by Yvon Prehn, using a modified image from www.morguefile.com

Previous versions of bits and pieces of this material have appeared on the Effective Church Communication website and other books and articles by Yvon Prehn.

Scripture versions and citations:

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.

In a world of blogs, tweets, websites, video, Facebook pages, and PowerPoint, are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

Short answer: YES!

Churches vary in many ways, but one thing they all have in common is the church bulletin. But within that commonality, there is tremendous diversity in how a church bulletin is used, the format it is created in, and the contents of the bulletin. All of these areas make a difference in the growth and spiritual success of the church and we'll discuss them in the material that follows for a more complete answer to the opening question.

Some churches give out the bulletin when people come into the service; some give it to people when they leave the service. For some the bulletin is one piece of paper folded in half, printed in black ink on white paper, for others it is a 16-page, full-color, magazine-quality publication. The denomination, culture, and budget of your church are all part of what makes church bulletins different. But despite the differences, the advice that follows will help all types of

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

churches make the most of their printed bulletin, no matter what the style or length.

At the same time, because of the differences, not every tip or idea here will apply to every church—please take what is useful and when you read something that does not apply to you, pray for the success of other churches as they create bulletins to fulfill their calling.

What about the web and social media? Don't they change everything?

Before we talk about the bulletin, we have to address the place of the bulletin in the overall world of church communications. In the past, every church had a printed bulletin because that was the only way to communicate the news, activities, and business information to church members. With the advent of digital media, including the web, social media, and PowerPoint, we have many more options today. Church communicators are validly asking questions like this one:

"We're doing our announcements on PowerPoint and we have all the information about our weekly activities on our website. We are an outreach oriented, contemporary church and our staff has been wondering—do we still need a written bulletin in this age of technology?"

The answer to the question above and similar ones many churches struggle with today, is more complex than a simple "yes" or "no," because its answer is part of an all-encompassing trend in communications today—the trend towards multi-channel communications.

What multi-channel communication is and how the bulletin fits in

Multi-channel communications mean the church no longer primarily has print, plus perhaps television and radio, as communication channels. Technology has made the web and all the forms of digital communication possible and lower costs mean almost all of them are affordable for churches. In this situation churches can no longer communicate using only one channel if they want to be effective in outreach and discipleship.

Because there are so many channels, it's natural to want to do away with some that appear outdated or unnecessary. As the previous question illustrates, the most frequent target for cutting back is the printed church bulletin. Though a tempting target, the printed church bulletin is an essential communication tool for a church to grow in numbers and your people in discipleship maturity. To cut back on printing the church bulletin or the contents in it is a huge mistake.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

Before we get into the specifics of why this is true about the bulletin, we need to address this underlying desire for churches to simplify their communication ministry. In the midst of this flood of communications channels available to churches—the web, print, social media, projection systems, podcasts, TV, radio—it is natural to feel overwhelmed and to ask:

- Is there ONE way to communicate that works best for churches today? We can't do them all, so what is most important?
- Is it print as we've always done it?
- Or is it something new—the web, blogs, podcasts, video, email, PowerPoint?
- Is it social media such as Facebook, Twitter and whatever new thing comes up?

These questions about what is the most effective communication channel to reach people are only part of our concern. Another huge issue is the people and hours needed to create communications in all the areas that now seem essential. This is critical because in most churches, often just one and at most, only a few people, are responsible for all the communications, and most of the time communications creation is only one part of a very full job. We want to reach our world, but the questions above express the reality that if a church could concentrate on one or two technologically powerful tools, the work load for the church communications person would be so much easier.

Though this desire is understandable, unfortunately, in our world that demands multi-channel access to information, communications isn't an area where church life can be simplified and here's why:

We live in a time of *both/and*, not *either/or* in technology and communication

We must keep adding new ways to communicate and we can't completely drop any of the old ones if we want to reach the world Jesus called us to reach. Though demanding, communicating in a multi-channel setting is possible, exciting, and challenging when you catch a vision for the power it has to help us fully fulfill the Great Commission.

We can't simplify communication to one or two methods or channels because, in the church today, we have people who span every level of involvement in technology from those who are never unhooked from their web-enabled mobile phone to those who will live long, happy, and fulfilled lives and never go online.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

Pastorally we can't ignore people who want to receive church communications in a way that we consider outdated. We must be the servants of our people, not the technology snobs of the church who dictate what technology is required to receive our message in the way we want to send it. Especially if you work in a church office with an adequate technology budget and you have the latest technology tools, it's easy to forget that:

- Not all the people in your congregation have smart phones that are video capable. Not everyone would use them even if they had one.
- Some still do not have a computer at home. Depending upon the economic situation of your church, this might be a sizeable group of your people.
- Even if they do have a computer, they may not have the same high-speed access to videos or other image intensive media that you had when you created your communication.
- Not everyone enjoys Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, social media, and other communication channels or they are in various stages of learning and using them.

In addition to pastoral concerns in outreach, if we follow the biblical command to "be all things to all people that we might win some," yes, we need the latest tech tools and means of communication, but for both pastoral uses and for outreach, we live in an age where, though we do need to keep adding forms of communication technology to our church communication menu, we can't do away with useful forms from the past.

We need to communicate through every available channel so that no matter where people are in terms of technology they can understand and respond to our message.

One of the most important tools is the printed church bulletin.

The importance of a printed bulletin for church outreach

If a church is truly outreach oriented, and if newcomers are attending each week, though we may feel that cutting-edge technology, employed on the web, social media, and in the multi-media in the worship service is important for our image, it may not touch people who are new to the church nearly as effectively as the printed bulletin.

For example, if someone comes in late to your church service, if they had trouble parking or locating child care, they may not make it into the service early enough to see the multi-media projections of beautifully created and

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

challenging announcements. A new person, who picked your church at random as they were driving around on Sunday, may not even know you have an incredible website or what is on it. Without a printed bulletin, if you only advertise events through PowerPoint announcements or on the website, if the visitor misses those they will have no idea what activities you offer during the week.

Even more important is that without a printed bulletin a visitor may not understand what is happening in the worship service itself

Imagine a truly unchurched person visits your church. The service starts with 30 minutes of people singing songs the visitor doesn't know. Everybody is standing up. The songs are repeated. Repeated some more. The visitor has no idea why people get so excited (hands raised, people swaying in ecstasy) about some very simple lyrics that are repeated again and again. The visitor may want to sit down, but has no idea if this is appropriate. This is followed by the performance of an amateur skit or moody video which seems to make sense to most of the people, but not to the visitor who wonders what flowing streams have to do with church. Then an offering is taken. The heart-felt plea prior to it on how the budget shortfall needs to be covered confirms every suspicion about how churches only want your money. Sometimes plates of tiny cookies and a bit of juice are passed around when the lights dim and somber music is played. Please forgive me, there is no irreverence intended, but that is how a Protestant communion service might appear to a visitor who did not grow up in church.

Without an explanation of what is going on in the church service, preferably in printed form, these actions are not "seeker-friendly" no matter how enthusiastic your praise band or professional your projected graphics.

Pastors—it can be a mentally and emotionally challenging obstacle course for a new person to make it to the part of your service where you present your relevant and life-changing sermon. All the confusing, frustrating, and uncomfortable activities for a church visitor described above often take place before you get up to speak. A printed bulletin can explain the process and put the worship activities in perspective from the minute a visitor sits down, whether they arrive early or late. Following, you'll see an example that in just a few short paragraphs solves all these concerns.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

One way to solve the challenge of how to inform people about what is going on at a church service is to have a clear Order of Worship in the bulletin.

Some churches have done away with this key informational section because they assume "everyone knows what's going on." If the church operates on that assumption for long it will become true because visitors won't come back a second time and all you'll have left will be current members who understand what you do. If you want visitors to come back, what is going on has to make sense the first time they come.

There are many ways to create an Order of Service. It doesn't need to be what it was in the past, though many traditional ones are excellent examples of great communication. Clear and boring is far better than missing and confusing. Following are examples of how two totally different churches handled this challenge. These come from my book, *Ministry Marketing Made Easy*.

A few more comments before the examples are helpful to keep in mind. The Order of Service is one of the most important parts of the church bulletin for both visitors and longtime members as the examples illustrate. Remember, no one else understands what goes on during the church service and why you do what you do as well as they church staff does. What consumes the thoughts and work days of the church staff means little to visitors or the congregation. A primary way for them to understand what is going on Sunday morning is what you put into the printed bulletin. People are not mind-readers. In our post-Christian world, there is no common knowledge of the Christian faith or practice in church. These are a few of the reasons a printed bulletin is essential.

For visitors, the printed bulletin is literally the "program" and without it visitors can be confused and frustrated because they won't understand what is going on or what's next. For longtime members, it can serve to remind them of why they do what they do.

There are many ways a church can improve the Order of Service to make it more understandable to visitors. Below are two of my favorites, sent to me from seminar participants. Many seminar participants have asked for these and I've reprinted them below for you. Feel free to copy, modify, and use anything that might help make your church service more understandable.

Two examples of an Order of Service for Church Bulletins

An order of service for a contemporary church:

The following is from a church bulletin for a contemporary, charismatic church. It didn't assume folks knew anything about what would happen and they explained their service in this way:

Our Worship Service: *thanks for joining us today! We will begin with about 30-40 minutes of singing. Feel free to sit, stand, sing, dance or just listen as we express our worship to God using all our heart, mind, soul and body. If you don't know the songs, hang on, we'll sing them a couple of times-and don't worry, we didn't know them at first either.*

The Message: *A time of practical teaching from the Bible.*

The Offering: *This is a time for church members to share with the church financially how God has blessed them. If you are a visitor, don't feel you must contribute—the only gift we'd like from you is your Connection Card. Consider this service our gift to you!*

Prayer Time: *there will be people up front after the service to pray for any needs you may have. Please come up if interested!*

Refreshments: *Join us for coffee, lemonade and munchies in the lobby after the service.*

The above bulletin wasn't complex or fancy, but a stranger would know what to do and wouldn't feel awkward sitting down or not participating in the offering. They may even feel relaxed enough to fill out a connection card or ask for prayer.

Since I started sharing this printed Order of Service, many churches have used this shortened statement, either on the cover of their bulletin or as a header on the Order of Service page: "Feel free to sit, stand, sing, dance or just listen as we express our worship to God using all of our heart, mind, soul, and body." This little statement alone is tremendously freeing and comforting to a visitor. Also, you don't have to change it each week;=]

] it can remain the same and yet it says so much in just a few words.

Order of service for a liturgical bulletin

This style of service has its own challenges. Though in many Lutheran churches, and in churches with a similar worship style, the words of the service are printed out, a person who did not grow up in the tradition of the church may not have any idea the meaning of what they are reciting.

As a solution to help visitors feel welcome, some churches provide a running commentary down the left-hand margin of the bulletin that explains what is happening. Below is an example.

In the Order of Service, this bulletin had the traditional headings of Invocation, Confession and Absolution and Introit of the Day. To the left of each of these sections were the following explanations:

"Invocation" means "calling on" and here we call on the Lord's presence.

In the "Confession" we name our sins silently before the Lord and accept responsibility for the harm they have caused in our relationships with God and each other.

In the "Absolution" the Lord speaks through the office of pastor to apply the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the cross to us in a personal and public way. (John 20:23).

"Introit" mean's "entrance" in Latin. Now that we have been washed clean of our sins the pastor enters into the altar area. The Introit usually comes from a Psalm.

This bulletin continues in this way and provides excellent help in understanding for a visitor. Every church has terms that might not be familiar especially for visitors and often for infrequent attenders. Take time to explain them and it will do more to market your church positively than an expensive billboard on the freeway, a website with moving graphics in your header, or a postcard outreach mailing that cost thousands of dollars. If you are a church that clearly explains how to have a relationship with God, word gets around.

Faith explanations are continuously needed

You may be tempted to think that it isn't necessary to explain key words like the ones above because people in the church know their meaning. Some may,

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

but probably far less than you assume. Many people have told me that if they took time to explain things in this way, that not only did visitors appreciate them, but the church staff was surprised at how many members said they had forgotten why they did what they did. This is especially true for members who may have left the church years ago, but who return to the church as adults when they have children.

I experienced the truth of this at the end of one of my seminars. During the seminar, I'd read the examples above as part of teaching people how to create effective church bulletins.

As the seminar ended, a gentleman came up to me and said, "I wanted you to know that I've been a member of the Lutheran church all my life; attended all my life. But it wasn't until you read the meaning of the Absolution today that I understood it for the very first time."

Then he paused and continued, "I think I got saved today."

The power of the words we use

His words made me realize that the terms we sometimes unthinkingly use and repeat week after week without explanation are words that represent theologies men and women died for. The service order and freedom we so casually observe was not easily won and isn't available to many in our world.

The words and actions in our Order of Service represent eternal truths and we must take care that we do everything we can to make certain we help visitors and members fully understand their meanings.

Your printed bulletin may be the first time an unchurched person encounters these words. Take the time to explain them creatively to encourage a visitor to begin an exploration of the Christian faith. In addition, be sure to provide a note, somewhere in the church bulletin, that refers to your website and a more in-depth explanation of your denomination and the meaning of the Sunday liturgy, plus an encouragement to explore and ask questions. You have an opportunity to connect with someone new to your way of worship—make the most of it.

Your printed bulletin can also work as a PR or Outreach Brochure

A printed church bulletin can do so much more than let people know what is happening during the service, though that is vitally important. A printed bulletin, if done completely and carefully, also provides information for visitors

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

to read when they get home to find out more about your church. Things may happen quickly during the service, in confusing and unclear ways, but if the bulletin takes the time and care to talk about what is important to the church, what it means to be a Christian, what your church tradition is about, what activities are going on in the church, and how to be a part of them, the bulletin will work as an extended dialogue with a visitor.

Used in this way, the bulletin functions as a PR or Outreach Brochure—you don't have to pay for postage or a big advertisement in the newspaper or online to tell strangers about your church—put everything you want to say to a visitor in your bulletin and they will come to you to get it. If your bulletin contains email addresses and phone numbers, they may contact you. If you have website references, they may explore them. They may put the bulletin away and look at it again if a need arises in their life.

You never know how a visitor might respond, but none of these potentially life-changing actions will happen if you don't put the printed information into their hands. Every week, visitors come through your doors and often they will read ANYTHING you put into their hands because they are looking for answers.

Churches often complain that in the current church "nobody reads what we write" and that may be true to some degree, but regardless of the response of sometimes jaded church members, keep in mind the visitor. So how do you know what to put into the bulletin? One idea that might help follows.

What does your bulletin say to someone totally unfamiliar with the church?

If you really want to reach unchurched people, please don't make the mistake of printing short, brief bulletins that have little information in them. To understand the lost opportunities, hire (pay them a fair hourly wage along with perhaps a nice lunch) some recent visitors to your church to help you evaluate the bulletin.

Don't ask leading questions such as "How do you like the bulletin or how friendly is the church?" People want to be nice and they probably won't give you the information you need if you ask leading and meaningless questions. Instead, give them the church bulletin, or two or three to get a broad spectrum of information, and then simply ask the questions that follow.

Without any additional information, what does the bulletin tell you about our church in these areas?

- What do we do in our Sunday service?
- What do the different parts of the service mean?
- Why do we do them?
- What do we believe?
- What do we have for spiritual seekers?
- Who is Jesus?
- What does it mean to become a Christian?
- Where can people go for answers to questions?
- What activities are going on this week?
- How do you get to them?
- What will happen at them?
- Is child care provided? What is the cost?
- Why should you go to any event outside Sunday church?
- Why should you come back next week?

If you sincerely ask those questions and give people permission to answer honestly, you'll be in for an enlightening time. Ask your question, be quiet and let them talk. If you find you want to break in, explain, tell them what you really meant—that is information that you should have clearly explained in the bulletin.

Many churches totally miss out on answering these questions in the bulletin because they assume everybody in the community knows as much about what is going on in the church as the church staff does and they never bothered to check if that assumption was true or not. A few hours of your time and some money spent actually talking to people who do not attend regularly, but who may be potential members of your church, is well worth the effort.

I hope you take a careful look at the answers to the specific questions about what your bulletin communicates about Jesus, your beliefs, and how to become a Christian. There is so much confusion in our world today about these eternally important issues and if you miss the opportunity to explain them in your church bulletin, the bulletin becomes little more than the event calendar for a social club. You have the Words of Eternal Life—be sure your bulletin shares them.

What can happen if you do an evaluation like this

This is a true story. A pastor shared with me his experience when his church decided to find out what unchurched people really thought of them and how their congregation interacted with strangers. He said the church hired someone who was totally outside the church, had never attended church regularly to be a "secret shopper." For four weeks he was to attend the church and then secretly meet with the pastor to discuss his experiences. The pastor sharing this with me said the first three weeks were fantastic, he learned a lot, the church was even friendlier and communicating better than he assumed before the project, though he learned some areas that could be improved. Then he laughed and said, "But after the third week, the man became totally useless as a secret shopper—he got saved—and lost all objectivity!"

The church may have lost a secret shopper, but the angels in heaven rejoiced.

The importance of a printed bulletin for holidays and special events

Even in our post-Christian, secular world, many people who never come at any other time of year will come to a church on holidays or for special events such as Christmas and Easter. Most churches spend significant amounts of time and money to advertise special events and to put on significant holiday services. Churches are usually rewarded with a large turnout and everyone has a great time.

Though most churches do a great job of actually putting on special services, making a connection with unchurched people at and after the event the event itself is a bigger challenge than the event itself. You have to make a connection with the print communications you give them at the event and for special event Sundays if you want people to attend your church for more than special events or holiday celebrations.

People don't take home the experience itself in tangible form. They may take home happy memories and a warm feeling about your church, but that warm feeling does little to remind them what your church does on a regular basis.

In addition to your overall bulletin, a communication piece that can make all the difference is a printed bulletin insert you give them on that Sunday, one with graphics and a theme related to the event (see the one that follows) that explains who you are as a church, why Jesus is important, and specifically invites them to join you in the eternal adventure of knowing Him. In addition to an overall message, have a specific invitation such as "Come back every Sunday

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

at 11am to learn more about how you can live a life of peace and purpose." You could also include, perhaps on the back, a list of the various ministries in your church along with contact phone numbers and emails, plus a list of links on your website or the web overall to explore answers to questions about the Christian faith.

For example, a bulletin insert given out at Easter might say something like this:

Still have questions? Many people do.

You've just heard the story of Jesus rising from the dead, but after you leave the church, when brunch is over and you've had your fill of chocolate, you might wonder—is it just a story?

Or did it really happen?

If it did, what does it mean to me?

If you've got those questions, we've got options for you.

On the back of this sheet we hope you'll check out the websites and events we've got to help you in your research.

Take all the time you want. The issues are worth it.

On the back of a handout like this you could then list some upcoming seeker Bible studies or discussions, some websites to explore, some books they might want to read. Be sure also to include emails or phone numbers of people in the church who are willing to interact with people who have questions about the Christian faith and who are able to lead a seeker to Jesus.

This kind of outreach must be printed. Yes, you could and should send out a follow-up email (if you collected email contacts) to visitors after the service with the same material. But even if you do send out digital follow-up, a printed piece will touch everyone, whether they have or check email from a church. In addition, repetition is essential to effective communication of any message. The more you can repeat any message in as many communication channels as possible increases the likelihood your message will be understood and acted on.

If your church takes the time to create printed bulletin announcements and inserts that explain the church and the Christian faith, and invite people back,

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

your special event will be more than a great celebration in itself and will serve as a connecting link to your church and increased attendance every week.

Much more on this method of using special events as connecting points is covered on the Effective Church Communications website <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>. The site will teach you a new way of helping your church get people back to church after a special event (instead of the usual huge attendance at the Easter or Christmas service and then back to the same numbers the following week) by showing you how to create communications before, during, and after the event. Your church bulletin is a key delivery system for them.

In addition to seasonal inserts, always include a connection card

One of the most important parts of a print bulletin is your connection card, either a separate piece of lightweight card stock, inserted into the bulletin, or a tear-off part of the bulletin itself. This is essential because if you make it easy for people to give you contact information, you have a way to follow-up with them. All the strategy you need to create effective church communication cards, how to make sure you get the greatest number turned in, how to follow-up, plus design ideas and tips are in the book, *Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people, little cards, big results*. This book is available on our website and through amazon.com.

Don't let saving paper or time be more important than saving people

Invariably in a discussion on creating an expanded, printed bulletin that clearly explains what is going on in the church and completely informs people about upcoming events through announcements, bulletin inserts, and connection cards, someone always brings up questions concerning additional costs in terms of time and paper to do expanded communications.

While these are valid concerns, sometimes I have to shake my head. My sinful self wants to smack them on the side of the head and yell:

"The church does not exist to save paper! What are you thinking?"

"You want to save a few pieces of paper, you think you don't have time or money to put more information in the bulletin, but we have people coming every Sunday to the church, looking for answers, hurting from disappointments in life, people with unspoken needs and pain and what do we give them? The abbreviated version of what's going on presented in a way only insiders understand?"

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

"Why do we do what we do? Is the purpose of the church to function as a recycling facility?"

"Have we forgotten we are here to share the words of eternal life? And there is no cost so great that it justifies the loss of one human soul?"

I then remind myself to take a deep breath and to continue to share why a printed bulletin, and often a bulletin requiring additional paper, is not only essential to let people know what is going on at the event they are currently attending, but because. . . .

Your printed bulletin can be a key piece in your evangelism strategy

Sometimes people think being involved in evangelism is some big, scary, difficult thing—it isn't.

Often it is little things that can turn a life around. One of those little things might be a printed church bulletin that clearly presents the answers to life found in Jesus and how your church can help people find Him.

People will take the printed church bulletin home and read it over to learn about you and what sort of spiritual answers or resources or activities you provide. They look for answers, do you provide them?

- Does your bulletin introduce people to Jesus?
- Does your bulletin clearly state what it means to be a Christian or how to become one?
- Does your bulletin contain short testimonies of people who have become a Christian, how and why they made that decision?
- Do you have a link to your website, an email address, or a real person to call if a seeker wants to learn more than is in your bulletin?

Never underestimate the power of a clear presentation of what it means to and how to become a Christian in your church bulletin. To illustrate what this can mean in real life, from my many years of interacting with church communicators, two stories (both true) come to mind:

Story #1: A church elder and communicator shared with me that he started coming to his church many years ago because, as an ex con who felt alone, desperate and suicidal, one Sunday he was eating lunch at McDonalds and picked up off the floor a church bulletin someone had dropped. "When I read over their bulletin," he said, "they looked like people who would be kind to me." He went to the church the next Sunday and his life was changed.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

Story #2: A church secretary shared that she sent church bulletins and notes each week to the church members, family, or friends who were in jail or prison. One week she got back a note that said, "Thanks so much for caring and sending me the church bulletin. I wanted you to know that because you have such a clear explanation in it about what it means to trust Jesus that I'm able to use it as a gospel tract. I've already let 3 inmates to the Lord because of it!"

You don't have to have a mailing list, pay postage, or take out an expensive newspaper ad to get people to come to your church or to reach people for Jesus—every week visitors come to you—and they will read whatever you put into their hands, PLEASE make the most of it to share the good news about Jesus.

Have your pastor craft a salvation message that clearly and passionately expresses what it means to become a Christian in the language of your church tradition— Baptists will express it one way, Catholics another, Lutherans differently still—but put it in there. We all serve the same Jesus, but in the beauty of the Body of Christ we express our connection to Him in different ways. Whatever your church tradition, make it clear what steps a person needs to take to have their sins forgiven and enter a relationship with the living God. Put in contact information of someone who will confidentially and immediately follow up. Pray for and be prepared for responses.

One more thing about including information about how to become a Christian and what it means in your bulletin. I recently saw a relatively plain, information-starved bulletin and though I tried to gently critique the lack of basic information to the people wanting feedback on it, the most seriously sad thing about it was that the last page was almost blank. To not put in connecting details for church events is one problem, but nowhere in the bulletin was there anything about Jesus and what it means to trust him as Savior, in short, there was nothing about what made the church Christian or the importance of Jesus to people's eternal destiny. They had plenty of room to do it on the bulletin and an adequate printing budget, but they felt that it was more important for the bulletin to have "white space" and that they didn't want to overload visitors with too much information, and that's why they left it blank.

You don't win people to the kingdom of God by not communicating with them or communicating less. A blank page tells them nothing about Jesus. This empty space is what visitors will take with them as they leave the church, perhaps

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

never to be confronted again with the Christian message—oh, what a sad waste. Please don't make that same mistake on your bulletin.

We are all commanded to obey the Great Commission. When people come to you and visitors come to your churches from all over the world, you have a great opportunity to obey.

Pastoral uses of a printed bulletin

The pastoral office is a shepherding one and sometimes your flock needs a bit of a nudge to travel the path of Christian growth and discipleship. In most churches this means church attenders need to become involved with the activities of your church outside Sunday morning. To help your people do this, your church bulletin, the printed bulletin, is a key tool that nothing can replace.

Consider this example: for regular attenders, even if they see the PowerPoint announcements before church, chances are when Thursday night comes around and they need to know what the kids are supposed to bring to youth group and where it's going to be held, they won't remember the PowerPoint presentation, no matter how beautiful the graphics. They won't remember the details of time, location, and cost from the few seconds it flashed on the screen. If they remember an event is going on, but don't remember the connecting details, chances are no one is at church they can call. And since most churches rarely update their websites—they can't go to the web for information.

However, if they have the church bulletin and the bulletin contains complete information—they have what they need and it is more likely they will attend. For special events, a bulletin insert that functions like a mini-billboard that they can post on the refrigerator (communication central of every home) will make the chance people will attend even better.

The ministry of reminding

Reminding people (in print, through emails, posting on the website; printing it in the newsletter) is part of pastoring people. The print bulletin serves as a shepherding tool for your congregation and visitors to:

- Remind them of events to attend
- Remind them of prayer requests
- Remind them of the financial status of the church
- Remind them who needs volunteers in a church ministry

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

- Remind them that hunger never takes a holiday and where to contribute to the food pantry
- Remind them who to contact when needs arise
- Remind them through sermon notes and web references of the teaching
- Remind them to be thankful for the blessings of God and the fellowship of the church

All these pastoral actions can take place in a tangible, take-home, long-lasting form through your printed church bulletin. Remember also to make it clear when events are open to visitors (if they are) and to have all the details so people can connect with the event.

More on the pastoring aspects of various forms of communication

How you choose to communicate and what forms you use to create your communications show how you value people. It is obvious that some age groups use technology more than others and some do not. This should be reason enough for multi-channel communication, not communication exclusion. I recently observed a situation where I think this went very wrong.

There is a new church in our area that does not use a printed bulletin. They only email the bulletin to those on their emailing list; it is not available for general viewing on their website. What does this reveal about their pastoral concerns?

My husband was recently at a pastors' breakfast where he asked one of the church staff from that church what they did for the older folks who perhaps did not have access to email. The person he spoke with was quite honest when she answered, "We aren't interested in having those people attend our church. We are targeting 30-40-year-olds."

I could digress into an extended rant on the current popularity of churches "targeting" a specific age or demographic group, which I consider a totally unbiblical approach (the Bible makes clear the gospel is for "whosoever will" and the church made up of "every tribe, nation, male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile," and ages are NEVER criteria for the ageless, eternal people of God), but this is not the place for that. I must comment, however, that I wonder what will happen in a church like this one when the staff members age past their "target" range. Will the staff be asked to leave because they are no longer of interest to the church?

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

How easy it is to forget we will all be older and not part of the target audience age range someday. How easy to ignore the reality that someday a technology will be invented that may leave some currently cutting-edge people clutching an outdated iPhone and feeling foolish because they don't understand the latest and greatest tech wonder. If you want people to be kind and to communicate with you when you no longer quickly catch on to the latest new thing or can't afford it, you may want to model that behavior now.

Your true opinion of people shows in how you communicate

The someday of the obsolescence of preferred technology will come more quickly than the narrowly-focused imagine, but the point of this illustration is not simply to beat up on the young and short-sighted. It is just as insensitive for older staff members to refuse to use email or text or to read Facebook updates. If you want to communicate to some members of your congregation, you must learn to use these tools or at least be sure there is someone on your staff who manages these areas.

No matter what your age and technical preference, the forms you choose to use for communication express your value of people whether you formally state it or not. You can preach passionately about loving others, caring for "the least of these," but if you really believe that or not will be revealed in how hard you work to communicate to a diverse audience that needs the messages of your church.

If you follow the biblical commands to love and care for all people in your church, you will create communications in formats that serve all of your people by creating communications in a variety of formats and channels. Though a print bulletin is the focus of this publication, please don't assume that print is the only way to communicate today. To shepherd and care for all the people in the church:

- You'll have an on-line bulletin for the people who prefer that.
- You make sure it is accessible on your website as well as in mobile phone format.
- You'll also have your bulletin and other communications in written forms for those who do not have access to electronic communication.
- If you really care about the elderly, you'll have one in big print for those who cannot read any other format.
- You'll even mail it out to shut-ins.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

We are living in a transition time in communications and an explosion of communication devices are being used by the various groups in our churches. This won't sort out or get easier for a long time.

To help you deal with all the forms you need to create, here are some tips:

- Expand the communication team in your church to include people who can create the various messages of the church in the various formats you need.
- It is easier to train someone to do a form of communication than it is to give them a heart for ministry. In practice, this means you might train a volunteer in the senior's ministry to create communications for his or her peers, rather than forcing someone not in the group to do them. The Effective Church Communication website (www.effectivechurchcom.com) has additional information and training for how to create church communication teams.
- Pray for insight and wisdom on the use and allocation of resources needed to reach various people. If you have a vision to expand your communication channels or to keep some older ones, you may need to ask for a special offering to do that.
- Print is currently one of the most expensive channels, but don't cut print just because of cost. There are many print options and ways to be more cost-effective. I spent many years working with church office equipment companies and keep up many of the people and the technology. Take time to explore new options for print before you cut your print communications. Many of the new machines are far more cost-effective than ones were in the past.
- If you are not familiar with digital duplicators, or the new ComColor inkjet printers by the RISO Corporation you may want to take a look at them because the new machines have excellent print quality at very low production prices. RISO sponsored my seminars in the past and I keep up with their equipment because no other company produces quite the same type of machine, especially the new ComColor printer. There are machines for small churches and production equipment for large churches, all incredibly fast, low-cost and every environmentally friendly because none of their printing systems use heat. Check on the web to find a local dealer who will do demos and run honest cost estimates for you. Be sure they understand the church market and how you must produce large quantities (e.g. the print bulletin) in a short time. Some machines can't handle this burst of production as well as others, but the church equipment sales professional should be able to advise you on this.
- One more comment about print production: the quality or amount of color and color images isn't nearly as important as your content.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

People always talk about the drawing power of color. Yes, color will get you to look at something, but looking at a color picture won't change a life. The content is what matters the most. Content is what will engage people, involve them, and keep them coming back. Choose a production printing system that will allow you to create as much content as you want and is necessary to grow your church in numbers and your people in discipleship maturity.

- Most important, remember to pray for strength to do all the forms of communication that are necessary.

What you cannot do, with pastoral integrity and biblical obedience, is to intentionally ignore the needs of one group of sheep. Your Chief Shepherd, who illustrated his love by telling the story of how the Good Shepherd goes after the one little straying sheep, would not be pleased.

Use your various communication tools: web, PowerPoint and print, to enhance each other

Just because you print the bulletin, doesn't mean you cut back on any of these other areas or channels. In addition to creating the various channels of communication so they meet the needs of all the people in your church, the channels can synergistically make every form more effective. Remember it is the time of **both/and** in effective communication ministry in the church.

Following are some suggestions on how this works:

Websites

Your website is a fantastic communication resource to refer to in the bulletin—many church members haven't visited it and don't know it has anything for them. Your church website can be a great place to store the audio files of the pastor's sermons for downloading with accompanying notes in PDF format. It can provide in-depth discussion and links of a topic the pastor mentions in the sermon. In addition, if the website is continuously updated, it can provide background, directions, and more information about weekly events.

Making certain your website is accessible with mobile phones will expand its outreach. Even if you only have the church calendar mobile-phone accessible, that's a great place to start. Technology tip: WordPress websites, which are very easy for anyone with even limited technology skills to create, have mobile-phone templates and automatically convert many of their regular templates into mobile-phone accessible formats.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

Bulletins can be archived on your website. Past bulletins on the website are great for people who cannot attend on a particular Sunday and for people who are considering your church. However, this use should be secondary, because far fewer people will look at them online than will at the church service.

PowerPoint

PowerPoint can be a powerful worship tool and sermon-learning tool. In addition, it can work well for announcements at the beginning and end of the service for things that are going on immediately after the service, for example to invite people to the Fellowship Hall for coffee and questions. Your printed bulletin can fill in the details that a PowerPoint slide advertises.

Social media

Social media can provide continuing links between people during the week, but without a print reminder and access directions in the print bulletin, visitors and members won't know the social media exists. A printed bulletin can serve as a directory for the other communication channels in the church.

A final review of the need for printed church bulletins

In many ways the printed church bulletin is the central hub of communication in the church because it gives every person who attends, whether a regular attender or a visitor, a way to connect with all the other communication channels of the church, no matter what technology they have access to.

Though we need every tech-savvy tool to illustrate our message and for the impact and repetitions they provide, effective, well-thought out printed bulletins are a useful tool for church communications. As a review, here are some of the reasons why printed bulletins are essential in churches:

- Printed bulletins are often a visitor's only way to understand what is going on at the service, what makes your church unique, what traditions you observe.
- Printed bulletins provide the information that links the people who attend the primary weekend services with the church events that take place during the week, at other locations, or months ahead.
- Printed bulletins contain messages from church leadership, stories and personal testimonies.
- Printed bulletins hold tangible ministry reminders such as inserts to put on the refrigerator, sign-up forms for camps and conferences, and sheets for taking sermon notes.

Are printed bulletins still needed in the church?

- Printed bulletins provide essential church staff contact information accessible to everyone.
- Printed bulletins can be scribbled on by children, read by anyone, sent to the homebound, and used as refrigerator reminders of events.
- Printed bulletins are a way visitors can find out about all your digital and social media—you can print links, URLs, excerpts and pictures in them.
- Printed Bulletins not only introduce people to your church, they can introduce people to the Christian faith and explain how to become a Christian, all of which can alter an eternal destiny.

Keep exploring, using and improving every new tool of technology to enable your church to more effectively communicate the gospel message, the activities and outreach of your church, but don't let go of the time-tested and reliable method of the printed church bulletin.

About the author

Yvon Prehn is the founder, director, and primary content creator of the training site for church communicators: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>, a website that provides simple, practical training in print and digital communications to help churches fully fulfill the Great Commission. She has also written numerous books and she blogs, tweets, and creates videos about church communications.

For more training, tips, ideas, and resources on effective church communications, connect with Yvon Prehn through:

Church Communications Training website:

<http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

Yvon Prehn's YouTube Channel (over 140 free, church communication training videos): <http://www.youtube.com/yvonprehn>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn>

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

Yvon Prehn's print books: <http://amzn.to/2keSunz>

Smashwords: <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/yvonprehn>