In the church office, to save time and your sanity:

Divide your communication team



Yvon Prehn

Overwhelmed with the communications you need to create in the church office? To save your time and sanity—these ideas will help

No one working in the church has enough time to get done all the communications that need to be done. One possible solution to this challenge is to use volunteers. However, when I suggest using volunteers as part of the church communication team, there are often the concerns:

What if I can't get them to do what I want them to do?

What if volunteers create materials that are not appropriate or up to the quality we want for the church?"

These are valid concerns, but to not use volunteers because of these concerns, is not the answer. Unless a church is very small, you need more than one person to do all the needed communication. Unless a church is very rich, you probably can't afford to hire all the people you need to do the necessary communication in The Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing needed to fully fulfill the Great Commission. Volunteers are essential and I've found that almost all of the concerns about using them can be answered if you divide your church communication team into two production levels.

A real-life example of the two production levels of church communications

Before I get into specific recommendations, let me share how this worked out in practice for me and what motivated me to come up with this division of labor in church communications. My bi-vocational pastor husband and I worked for many years in Single Adult Ministry. A number of years ago, the group we were leading was over 300 in membership and growing. I was doing all the communications as a volunteer, balancing that work with my ministry travels, seminar teaching, and writing. I did the overall newsletter, PR, and all the communications that related to the church: prayer requests, bulletin inserts reports, etc.

I realized as we grew that I did not have time to create all the PR material for many of the events that we had going on. More out of desperation than any well-thought-out plan, I announced that if someone was sponsoring an event for the singles group (we had a procedure in place for that process) the person or team sponsoring the event had to be in charge of doing their own PR.

An event came up and the young man and his friends who were sponsoring it were quite excited and more than happy to do up their own flyers for it. When he showed the finished result to me to me, my stomach knotted up; I felt ill. I estimated that he used almost every typeface he had on his computer on this one piece of paper and almost as many small pieces of clipart (yes, that is an exaggeration, but that is what it seemed like to me).

He was so excited about it. I wanted to throw up. It was honestly one of the ugliest flyers I think I'd ever seen. It did have all the information needed: it gave good directions, had a map, and clearly explained what was going on, but to my designer-trained eye—it was ugly.

But did I tell him that?

I'm sure the Lord sent an angel to cover my mouth, but this is what I heard come out of it, "That is wonderful—thank you so much for all your hard work on it!"

He printed the flyers in color (made it worse, I thought), mailed and gave them out. The event was a huge success.

My personal preference in design style meant little in the success of a flyer that met needs

I learned an important communication lesson from that experience.

I learned that if you are a lonely single person and you find out about an event that is free, that nice folks will be at it, that the event has food and free child care, and you get a flyer that clearly communicates all of this—do you really care what typeface is used?

Or how many pieces of clipart are on the paper?

Or that it doesn't pass "quality design" standards?

Of course not.

The core message was there, it told you what was going on and how to get to the event. People came and their lives were blessed, even by (what I considered) an ugly flyer.

I realized then that a church communication ministry could have two production levels for success and less stress for all involved

One level could be carefully managed to produce materials that needed to be a certain quality for the church overall. Though his flyer worked to get people to the event, something like that turned in to the church office to promote an event to the church overall would not have been appropriate. But there were many things going on in the ministry where this would be appropriate. Another level of communication creation could consist of projects you could joyfully turn loose and encourage—the flyers, postcards, reminders that were essential to get people to events that were distributed within the group. Having more than one standard for success in communication creation was liberating mentally and in practice.

As time went on we developed a communication team for the second level and a number of people developed skills in communication ministry. In the long term, many of the people on the team have since gone on to other churches and ministries and the training they received as part of the communication team there

has been useful. In the short term, the Single's ministry flourished and I didn't have so many communication production projects to try to fit into my crazy schedule.

In similar ways, I have found many churches are able to accomplish all the communications they need to create all Five Steps and fully fulfill the Great Commission if they divide their communication ministry into two production levels.

The Two Production Levels of Effective Church Communications are:

- 1. The PR Communication Production Level
- 2. The Ministry Communication Production Level

It is important to understand these two levels in terms of:

- 1. The communications produced in each one
- 2. The communications producer in each one
- 3. The guidelines and standards for each one

The requirements for both of the levels are described following. Keep in mind the communications produced in each level, can and need to be, in both print and digital formats.

PR Communication Production Level

1. Communications produced

In this level, the communications produced include the overall pieces that represent the church or ministry area, such as the logo, stationary, business cards, primary bulletin, newsletter, major outreach pieces and major ministry brochures. In the case of a ministry within the church, the primary pieces and the pieces that interface with the church communications program overall would also be included. In the digital world, the primary website and primary social media communications that represent the church or ministry should also be in this area.

2. Communications producer

For this level it is usually a staff person, whose job may or may not have other responsibilities in addition to producing communications. The larger the church, the more it is recommended that the church hire someone specifically to create and oversee communications. This could also be done by a volunteer who has the time and commitment to work closely with the church staff, or who is in charge of a ministry communications program within the church as I was with the Single Adult group discussed previously.

Training responsibilities: In addition to being the primary producer of communications, this person should also be in charge of training staff or volunteers in the various ministry areas of the church so they can create the volume of materials that are needed to complete all The Five Steps. No matter what the staff person at the church uses to create the primary church communications, MS Publisher, is my recommendation for volunteers to use to

create most print church communications. On the Effective Church Communications website are demonstrations of MS Publisher and an ebook that illustrates all you can do with it, plus resources to purchase the program at significant church discounts.

Some church communicators feel that for the church overall they need to use Adobe Creative Suite and that may be true for the materials that are produced at this level, especially if you interface with an outside printer. But it is rarely realistic to expect volunteers to purchase and learn to use Creative Suite.

Note to designers who have never used MS Publisher and who don't think it can produce "quality" communications:

Try it! You would be amazed at what you can do with this program! I learned design on the Mac with all the Adobe software and loved it. But then as I started to teach seminars and actually started doing communication work it the church, I realized if I wanted to work with real people in real churches, I needed a PC and needed to learn MS Publisher. After some initial grumbling and more than a few tears when I sold my Mac (I did not have the discipline to use the PC when the Mac was in the same room), I came to love MS Publisher. Over the years as I've used it more and more, I've been on somewhat of crusade to push the limits of what you can do with that program and now I create all kinds of publications with it, including hi-end glossy printing, website graphics, headers and ads, book covers and every imaginable kind of church publication including banners, posters, and signs. All of the editable templates and ready-to-print church publications on the Effective Church Communications website, all of the graphics, sidebar ads, thumbnail and other images, all my church website materials, all the covers for my book are all created with it. The only thing I still use the Adobe programs for is book layout for longer books and typesetting for publication.

The ECC website, has training in many areas that are useful for church communication teams including advice on the use of MS Publisher, some of the free software for image manipulation, as well as resources for free images. In addition, it has lots of church-specific tips for using a variety of programs, plus lots of ready-to-modify and print templates for church communications. Membership in the training resources of the site is only \$9.99 a month or \$99 a year and both the communication director and volunteers can use the site because the membership can be shared. Also, as a member you have permission to use any of the materials on the site (videos, lessons, templates) to train your volunteers. For basic and detailed training in the use of MS Publisher as a program, I highly recommend http://www.lynda.com.

Create templates and delegate: The person in charge of communication for the church can create templates and the volunteer team can update them as needed. For example, the church may want to create a flyer/postcard/give-out piece that advertises the men's ministry activities each month. The person in charge of

communications might design the overall logo and layout and set up a template. Then the volunteer communicator could track down the monthly details, write and edit and create the monthly piece, then email it back to the church to be printed and distributed.

Lead in inspiration and motivation: In addition to providing training in the how-tos of church communications, the person in charge should work hard to instill in volunteers excitement about their work, a ministry perspective, and Biblical passion for creating church communications. The eternal destiny of people is affected by church communications and we need to remind each other of the joy and responsibility of that. We need the Lord's help, wisdom and strength as we do our work. The book, *Devotions for Church Communicators* (available in download format on the Effective Church Communication website and in print form on the amazon site) provides weekly devotions and thought-provoking essays that will help churches create a communications team with the necessary ministry motivation to create communications that will change lives.

I highly recommend that before you start meetings on communication projects that you take a few minutes to read a devotion or Bible passage and pray about your work together. Remember as church communicators you are involved in spiritual warfare for the souls of people and you need the Lord's help, protection and peace as you work. Take time to acknowledge him and ask for help. Pray also for peace among the communication team and church staff and that the Lord give grant insight into your communication choices so that you touch hearts, meet needs, and motivate people to action in ways that are pleasing to our Lord.

3. Communications Guidelines and Standards

Communication standards need to be somewhat strict at this level, as these pieces reflect the overall vision and reputation of the church or of a ministry within the church. Also, this is the level where the standards are set for what is expected in all other communications.

As part of standard setting, though it is a significant amount of work, churches should consider creating a Style Guide.

A Style Guide will solve many problems upfront by setting standards and expectations. It can be as simple or as detailed as you want, but should contain:

How the logo, purpose statement or slogan of the church is to be used, colors, sizes, etc.

Key terms in the church, what is capitalized, how to use them, e.g. "elders" or "Elders," titles of pastoral staff: Rev., Right Reverend, Pastor, or Father, Brother or Sister, First Lady, Bishop, whatever is appropriate for your church. This is far from standard and will help people new to your church or denomination. If someone works in the church office who does not belong to your denomination, this will be a life-saver.

What is acceptable for the over-all bulletin, church website, social media sites, in terms of content, who can post or contribute, style, any other guidelines important to the church.

What needs what level of approval before various pieces need before they are shared with the church body or used as outreach?

Though a Style Guide can be very helpful, don't let it become a stifling force

Especially past this first PR Production level of church communications, e.g. the church bulletin in contrast with the postcard that goes out to remind the guys of a church work day, be much more flexible in your standards with the postcard than you are with the bulletin. If you try to be too strict in areas other than key communications, people just won't do the needed communications or they'll do them and avoid the church office entirely. A bit of trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives your people is useful here.

Many people in your church have a computer and printer and if you make it too difficult for them to get a flyer approved for a simple ministry event that only involves a small group within the church—they will simply ignore you and do it anyway. Instead of creating rules that cause resentment, work hard to create an atmosphere of encouragement and training for everyone.

Ministry Communication Production Level

1. Communications produced

The communications in this level includes everything else in the church outside the key, core communications listed above, including very simple notices, lessons, flyers and announcements to more complex communication projects. Also included are the many, many pieces that are needed within individual ministries of the church.

Some communication pieces that come to mind include those that make up the children's, youth, women's, men's, missions, singles, various other ministries in the churches. So often these ministries need communications done for people to be fully informed about what is going on and to enable people to join in the ministry, but the church staff simply does not have time to do them. They may not get done if standards are too tight or the church staff is expected to do everything. As a result, events aren't promoted or explained, people don't show up, and the overall ministry suffers and the church members miss out on opportunities that help them grow to mature disciples. Resentment over some ministries getting communications pieces done and others not getting the same amount or quality of PR or support materials can also happen and that's never good for the spiritual health of the church.

2. Communications producers

THIS IS IMPORTANT: here a staff person or perhaps a key volunteer may oversee, train, encourage and help, but the staff person cannot do everything needed for a

complete communications ministry in the church, nor should one person do it all for the whole church. Ideally, every ministry in the church (children's, youth, men's, women's, etc.) should have at least one person who can help do the communications needed for that ministry. Usually that person is a volunteer. At this level, the overall ministry communications staff member becomes a coach and encourager.

In addition to the advice in the previous section on training your communication volunteers, the materials provided by Effective Church Communications can enable the communications coordinator of the church to train the volunteers in ministry areas of the church to do their own communications or to modify templates created by the church office.

3. Communications standards: much more flexible

You do not need the same standards of design or perfection for a one-time postcard to remind the guys of the men's breakfast that you do for the four-color, outreach brochure for the church. You don't need the same control of the content of tweets sent out to the youth group that you do for the content on the primary website of the church.

If you are too hard on volunteers or try to control them too closely, they'll quit. People do improve in communication creation skills with time, training, and encouragement. The ministry communication staff person needs to decide what is really important in standards and what is simply picky, personal preference. Train to bring up to important standards and let the personal preference issues slide.

I know this is hard—I was raised in a German Mennonite household—flexibility does not come naturally to me. But I have learned that if I want to train people in church communications and ministry overall, that the hard and fast standards I was taught in housekeeping, need to flex a bit when it comes to communication creation.

Remember, the Lord put us into a body in the church, in part so our gifts can help and build up each other. The Two Production Levels of Effective Church Communication gives you a way to practically live out this biblical reality.

For the Two Production Levels—be sure both groups have a way to produce their communications

It's one thing to create a communication piece, for example, a brochure for the women's ministry, it is another to get it printed and distributed to all the women in the church. Far too often church pieces produced by volunteers are printed at home on inkjet printers and personally handed out.

This is an ineffective and often unfair practice. It is unfair because home inkjet printers are the most costly and time-consuming way to print any church publication. A volunteer should not be asked to assume that time and cost. The church office should do the printing or allow the volunteer to come in and use the

church equipment to print what they have created. One very effective way to do this is for the volunteer to save their publication as a PDF, send it to the church office via email, and then the church office staff or a communication production volunteer can print and distribute the piece.

The PDF format allows a publication to be printed by the person receiving it even though they may not have the same programs or typefaces. Though Adobe Acrobat is a high quality program that can do this, most volunteers don't have it or want to spend the \$200-400 it costs to get the program. The newer Microsoft Publisher programs allow you to save in the PDF format. This can work well and the process of saving and sending materials as a PDF should be part of the communications training process.

The challenge comes in when volunteers create their programs in Print Shop and other programs that don't have a built-in PDF creator. Fortunately there are excellent free PDF creation programs available. Cute PDF (dumb name, great program, available at: http://www.cutepdf.com) is one of them. Volunteers simply download the program and install it in their computer. It installs as a print driver and when a publication created in any program is printed with it, a PDF is created. This PDF can then be emailed to the church office and printed on the copier or digital duplicator.

On my training website, is a video that illustrates how to download the Cute PDF software and use it. There are numerous additional articles on church communications teams on this site also.

Your standards of perfection are not what ultimately results in communication success

This is hard to share because I know from many conversations and emails that some people in the church feel that if all the communications are not perfect (according to their definition of the term) that the church cannot be successful. In other instances some people feel if their publications contain one typo they have somehow let down the church and the Lord. Following is an article that may be helpful:

Perfection in church communications, inspired by Jesus

Sometimes people don't think they are doing all they can for the Lord, that they aren't excellent or perfect enough in their communications ministry unless what they produce is done in slick, full-color printing, preferably produced by an outside design company, or in the case of a website, one that is professionally programmed.

Sadly, since the standards of design and production are so high, it also often means that no one in the church is considered good enough to create the communications in print or on the website, so an outside, professional firm must be hired to do it or only products purchased from a professional company are

used. Or, if done at the church, only a select person or two in the church is good enough to produce the quality needed.

But being expensive and professional, as defined by using the standards of a professional ad agency isn't the only standard of perfection for the followers of Jesus.

If we honestly look at Jesus' life, what sort of standards of perfection did he have?

If we honestly want to follow Him, let's look at three areas where we see his choices in quality and perfection

First, his disciples: the ones he chose who would be trusted to carry out his message were a pretty scruffy group and they didn't get much better in three years. Not one of them was a professional religious person.

Second, his meetings: they weren't very organized affairs. There were often little kids running around, not enough food, constant interruptions by sick people—not what anyone would consider a professionally managed event.

Third, his succession plan: when he left his remaining disciples with the task of evangelizing the world, he didn't leave them with a plan even vaguely perfected. The Great Commission could be summed up as "tell people about me and help them grow in the faith." For a perfectionist manager today, those parting words have a tremendous about of wiggle room that would allow wildly divergent attempts to apply it.

It wasn't that Jesus didn't care about excellence, but he obviously had a different standard of perfection than what we might consider communication perfection today.

The true standard of perfection

Though perfection in service is an admirable goal, the primary goal in all ministry areas, communications included, is love. First Corinthians 13 helps us take love out of the realm of theory and make it practical in the challenge of perfection in communication ministry. In 1 Cor. 13, the chapter starts out talking about doing all sorts of things, one might say, with perfection: speaking in the tongues of men and angels, etc. The chapter continues by saying that if all of this is done without love it's just making noise and the chapter ends by saying that the greatest attribute we can have is love.

Love is also what matters the most in our church communications

I see a lot of communications today, in print and online that are perfectly beautiful and that express love in a variety of ways.

Right now I'm looking at a sample from my files of church communications: it is a professionally printed folder, done in gorgeous full color printing and it has 2 DVDs inserted in the folder so visitors can see the worship service and hear the praise

band. It also has a coupon for a free coffee from their coffee cart (one of my favorite ways of showing love). It is professional, beautiful, and yet very friendly and non-pretentious. No question this would fit anyone's standards of perfection in a visitor piece.

I'm also looking at another church bulletin sample that is perfect and loving in another way. This one was not produced with a computer. The church is small and very poor. The bulletin, with service information and weekly activities clearly described and listed, was produced on a very old word processor and the clipart hand-pasted on. It was reproduced on a copier that had obviously seen better days. Though she knows the limitations of the equipment, the person who shared it with me also shared that the church secretary who produces it each week wants it to be special for the church and visitors. She carefully prepares and proofs it and after her paste-up job she prints it on colored paper. She then collates it by hand and does a 1/3 of the page offset fold on each piece of paper. Down one side of the cover fold, she hand-cuts (with the scissors you use to cut scrap-booking pages) a fancy edge. She hand-cuts and hand-assembles each one. Her love and care for the congregation and Jesus in this labor-intensive production brought tears to my eyes.

These church publications are very different in surface ways, but at their core and what comes through most loudly is that their creators loved the people they were creating publications for.

A couple of final observations, commentary and final application notes on how Jesus gives us lessons on perfection in communications:

Observation #1: Jesus always focused on the needs of people in his communication, not on impressing people or showing how great he was.

He could have created a little world in the palm of his hand as a demonstration of his power; he could have had stars fall from the sky to demonstrate his might; he could have healed all the sick in a city with one booming command, but he didn't do any of those things to show his perfect godhood.

He showed us what God was like by meeting needs of his creation. He bailed out an embarrassed groom who ran out of wine at his wedding feast; he made little kids comfortable; he healed a woman humiliated by a chronic disease.

Commentary and application:

Perfection in communications doesn't come from showing people what a big-deal perfect church you are or how you can create communications that are more expensive and fancier than the church down the street.

Jesus idea of a perfect publication, if we follow his plan, would be one that made sure it addressed the needs of people. It would be one that told them why the event would help them, how it would serve them, how their lives would be better because of it. It would give them all the details necessary to attend without having

to take an extra step of calling someone or looking it up on the web or jumping from link to link if it was an email. Those details would include the time, location, name of person in charge, directions, child care provisions, and cost would all be there and easily accessible.

One area that I see this "perfection" lacking in so often today is in the area of church websites. I've recently observed a number of websites that were created using professional groups that supplied a fancy, flash-enabled, website with photos of smiling people on the nameplate, great colors and buttons to push to hear sermons. But try to find the details of what or where small groups are meeting or what time to get your kids to a youth group meeting and where it is being held or what the church really believes about anything and it can be an impossible task.

People do not go to church websites to be wowed by flashing graphics and bright colors or cheesy pictures of ethnically-diverse, grinning people, they go to have needs met. If they can't get those needs met quickly and easily, your website is far from perfect no matter how slick the home page is.

Observation #2: Jesus focused on potential perfection.

When Jesus called Peter, he was not anything like the Rock he would become. He was more of an irritating pebble in Jesus' journeys.

But every time Jesus called him, "Peter", Simon had a vision of what he would become. I imagine each time he heard that, he stood up a little straighter, perhaps determined to follow Jesus more closely. Eventually, he became the leader and pastor, the Rock, Jesus knew he would be.

Commentary and application

Your volunteers and staff members doing ministry publications seldom come into that job with any training at all. They are like Simon, far from, but growing into a Peter.

They are often far from perfect in communication knowledge about design ideas or execution. Focus on encouraging, equipping, and providing opportunities. Love them lots. Give them time to try things and to grow up in their skills. Provide training and tools and they will often amaze you at what they produce. Never prejudge someone based on age either as being too young or too old to learn any communication skill—with interest and proper training I have frequently seen church leaders astounded at what their own people were capable of.

Regarding training, I was recently talking to a lady whose church had spent several thousand dollars (a typical amount) to have their website professionally designed. In spite of the money spent, they were having all sorts of problems getting their church content to fit into the design and the costs kept mounting with each modification they asked for.

Knowing there were other options for getting this done (such as doing it yourself with WordPress, my strong recommendation), I asked her, "How do you think you could have done if the money spent on this company had been used to train you and give you time to implement what you learned?"

She just sighed.

This situation is repeated far too often and it shouldn't be. Your people have tremendous potential and with time, money and training they will not only accomplish great things for the church, but you will have participated in growing them in skills and service. To invest money and time in your people instead of a quick, "professional" solution may take more time, but the results will be much more lasting.

Observation #3: Jesus protected and encouraged his people

"Fear not!" "Be of good cheer!" Reminding his followers that the hairs on their heads were numbered—all of these and many more were the protecting and encouraging words Jesus continuously shared with his disciples. He reminded them he was their shepherd, vine, bread of life.

Commentary and application

Doing church communication work can be scary and discouraging. Complement your church communicators for every step of learning; encourage them to try new things and support a less-than-perfect effort if done with enthusiasm.

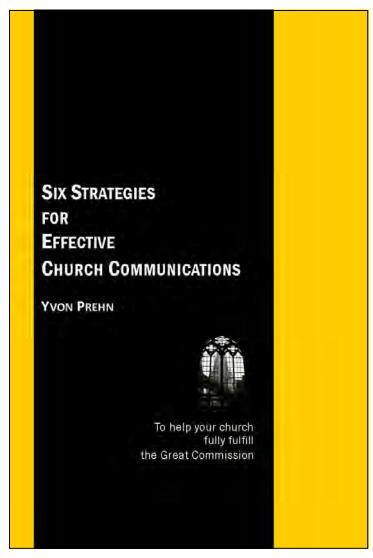
- Take extra care to shield them from negative and nasty people when helpful comments become hurtful criticism.
- Remind the critics to pray and contribute to the communication program at the church.
- Remind them that all of us are pilgrims and we haven't arrived at perfection in anything as yet, but that we all need love and encouragement as we progress to becoming more and more like Jesus in the perfecting of our service to him.

Conclusion to the two levels of communication production

At first, splitting your communication work, standards and team into two levels may seem like a lot of unnecessary work. Even thinking about bringing in volunteers might seem like too much of a headache. However, if you want your church to grow in numbers and your people in discipleship maturity, it will take many pieces of communications to do that.

There are limits to how much you can and should carry this work load. Especially if you are starting out as a church or are a smaller church, set the basics in place for a communication team and volunteer delegation. Working with one or two people is much easier than a team of thirty and your chances of church growth and the needs of a larger team will be much higher if from the start you have enough people working on communications to get done all that need to be done.

This eBook is an excerpt from:



No matter the size, budget, denomination or location of your church, you will be more successful at sharing your message if you do it strategically. This book shares the most important six strategies, that will enable your communications to reach people and grow your church. They are:

Strategy 1: Create multi-channel communications;

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: Make the most of Seasonal Celebrations and Special Events;

Strategy 6: Do not confuse irreverence for relevancy.

This book examines each one-by-one and teaches you how to practically apply them in your church.

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Immediate PDF download: http://www.effectivechurchcom.com/2012/06/ebook-six-strategies-for-effective-church-communications/

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Links to additional training materials from Yvon Prehn and Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications Training website: http://www.effectivechurchcom.com
The Effective Church Communications website has articles, many training videos, ready-to-print templates and PDFs for church communicators. It has hundreds of entries that can do

everything from equip a beginning church communicator to challenging a senior staff member to be more effective in their church communications. Please sign up for our email updates and you'll get short notices each week on new material posted on the site.

Yvon Prehn's books in paperback

A growing selection is available at http://www.amazon.com. Just enter "Yvon Prehn" in the search box to go to her list of books.

The regular amazon pricing, shipping, free shipping offers apply.

If you would like to purchase books in bulk at a reduced price, or are interested commissioning a Personalized Special Edition for a training event or conference, contact yvon@effectivechurchcom.com.

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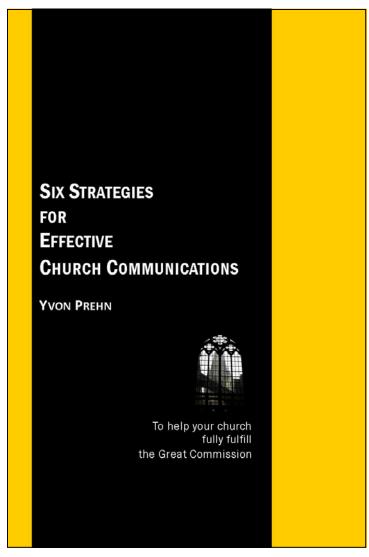
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For additional questions about the Effective Church Communications ministry, to request free reprint permission of articles, for interviews or contributions to websites or books, **email: yvon@effectivechurchcom.com**

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