what every church leader needs to know about church communications

yvon prehn

What every church leader needs to know about Church Communications

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION:
Communication that fully fulfills the Great Commission

Church communications today is a huge undertaking involving large amounts of time, talent, and finances. For what it costs in all of these areas, church leaders need to make certain that their communications are contributing to the fulfillment of the Great Commission given to us by Jesus:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matt. 28:18-20

Though I think all church leaders would agree that their church communications should contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission, most leaders don't have a clear picture of how their communications ministry fits into the process. Because of that, the communications ministry in most churches doesn't intentionally contribute to the overall, church-wide process of taking people from outside the church and growing them to mature disciples, in other words, fully fulfilling the Great Commission.

I would propose that fully fulfilling the Great Commission is both the only vision for and the desired end result of a church communication program that will give it the spiritual strength and focus to do all it needs do to change the eternal destinies of people. With the great tools we have today, any church can create good-looking communications in print and on the web, but the winning of souls and the shaping of lives into the image of Christ takes more than computer processing power and an eye for design.

Church leaders need the conviction that it is important for people to become mature disciples and you need a plan for how your church communications get help get you there. This booklet will help give you both, here's how:

After an introductory devotion, this book begins with the article: "Why discipleship is essential for the church to survive and why your communications are essential to develop disciples"

You might be tempted to skip this article, but please don't. I have spoken to thousands of people in the many years I traveled and taught church communications and at the core, the key issue for the lasting success or failure of church communications is always a spiritual one. If the decisions made by church leadership are based on what will help people come to know Jesus as Savior and grow in their relationship to him, and if the church truly believes that fulfilling the Great Commission by reaching unchurched people and helping them become disciples is the most important goal of their communications ministry, no matter what the tools used or the skill level of the people, their communications ministry will accomplish those goals.

On the other hand, if the church communications program doesn't have fully filling the Great Commission as its core value and vision, all sorts distractions, problems, and controversies can result and no matter how much money is spent on technology or services, the results will often not be what is expected. Battles may be fought over style; standards may be those of secular advertising and slickness

may replace spiritual power. Communication or marketing programs may be purchased that look good, but border on a "bait and switch" scheme in how appropriately they truly represent your church.

Next comes an article that gives you an overview of what your church needs to create in it's communication ministry to fully fulfill the Great Commission—The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing

This process, The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing, is explained and illustrated with a chart following the article. From many years of teaching and interacting with churches, I've found this plan to be tremendously helpful in that it gives those who lead in church communications a visual overview and map that shows precisely what needs to be produced and when, to move people from outside the church to fully committed disciples.

It helps church communicators see where all of their individual projects fit into the overall ministry and mission of the church and enables them to be more intentional in how they maximize the effectiveness of their communications each step of the way.

This article also shows how most churches unintentionally concentrate their communications ministry on the first part of the Great Commission and how they need to expand their vision and practice to be all they can be to help their people become all the Lord intends them to be by pressing on to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

The remainder of the booklet contains overall advice for church leaders as they guide their people through the implementation of communication challenges

"The lion has roared—who will not fear? The sovereign Lord has spoken, I dare not refuse to proclaim his message" (Amos 3:8, combined translations)

God has spoken and he has given us a message to share. To help you do that well is the purpose of my ministry, Effective Church Communications. Though my ministry has lots of specific advice, ideas, design and software tips, (for these and many more resources, please go to my website www.effectivechurchcom.com), my biggest concern is for your heart as you lead in communications ministry. My prayer is that the articles in this booklet will give you some practical and yet challenging ideas on how to lead in your communications ministry with a spiritual focus and servant's heart.

We have been given the words of eternal life to share. Because of the work we do, heaven will be different.

One of the most important task you have as a church leader is to do all you can to make certain your people carry out their communications tasks worthy of this high calling they have been given. My prayer is that you do it well.

Yours in His service,

Yvon Prehn

The media isn't our message—
our message is Jesus

Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:40-42)

When Marshall McLuhan, early pioneer of electronic media, pronounced in the early sixties, that "the media is the message," he was predicting that the means of communication would be more important than the message it carried. For his time, the primary media was television; more and more in our world it is computers, and in the resulting forms of digital communication: desktop publishing, the internet, cell phone, and small screen communications.

Though it is easy to get caught up in the complexity and power of digital communications, as Christians we must constantly remind ourselves that these incredible innovations, and any that are to come, are only tools. The power doesn't come from the tool or media—the power comes from the message.

As the apostle Paul said ,"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). The world "power" used in this verse comes form the Greek word, *dunamis*. It's the same root for our world dynamite and it means a "miraculous, mighty, wonderful power."

Our message, not the media we use to share it that is the source of true power. It was the same for the early disciples writing with pens on parchment, it will be the same for us if we are creating virtual reality holograms to illustrate Bible stories in the years to come.

We live in an age where the pace of change is incredible. Many of you started out in communicating with pencils, progressed to typewriters, and now operate computers on your desk more powerful than the ones they used to put a man on the moon. This pace will not slow down.

We need to always remember that no matter how powerful, overwhelming or impressive the technology, there remains, "only one thing that is needful" —the good news salvation found in Jesus.

from *The Heart of Church Communications*, by Yvon Prehn, available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn

Why discipleship is essential for the church to survive — and why your communications are essential to develop disciples

Then Jesus came to them and 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." Matt: 28:18

These verses are our marching orders, what we are supposed to be about as representatives of Jesus here on earth—that seems obvious. The actions required by these verses also seems obvious—go, baptize, teach—with the end result of making disciples.

What is also painfully obvious in many churches is that, as a whole, we aren't doing a very good job of fulfilling the Great Commission. This statistic from an article "Rethinking Leadership" by E.Glenn Wagner reports a situation similar to what many other studies reveal:

"Of the some 400,000 churches in the USA today, 85% are not growing, 14% are growing by transfer growth, and only 1% are growing by conversion growth."

I could bore you with reams of additional studies and statistics, but you know in the quietness of the your heart and the turmoil of your mind that the Christian church is losing ground, so let's skip the statistics and get to solutions.

The solution is to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

We don't do that by getting people into the church and then participating in an uplifting praise service and listening to a feel-good message. We fully fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples. To be satisfied with anything less for all of your people is incomplete obedience.

Your church communications, the complete program of them that goes through the Five Steps of Effective Church Communications, which is explained in the next article, will give you the practical steps of what to do, but you won't have the strength or will to create all of those communications if you don't understand and believe how important it is to make disciples.

Making disciples as a priority would honestly be a shift in priorities for many churches today because most grow by adding attendees rather than making disciples. A key way to reverse the current slide into irrelevancy and decline in the church today is for the church to make it a priority to intentionally make disciples instead of just adding people to the pews.

It is not an easy or quickly accomplished task and we need to look at a few more reasons why it isn't being accomplished before we can reverse our situation.

Why we are where we are—a low expectation of who is to be a disciple

Somehow in many churches, the only person the church expects to be a mature disciple is the senior pastor. Churches have huge expectations for the pastor and perhaps other leadership, but few for the church members as a whole. Perhaps

this is part of the pastor as superstar syndrome, the CEO model of leadership popular in the church today, or the misuse of delegation, where the pastor delegates and doesn't model, who knows, but this seems to be the situation.

Please don't misunderstand. The church should have high expectations in morality and integrity for church leaders, but these expectations should be the same for every member. That is not the expectation in most churches— the situation in which we find ourselves is that most church members live lives no different than the world around them in terms of spiritual maturity. In sharp contrast is the biblical view that "**we all** reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 13—italics mine). I would venture to say that the expectation to become totally like Jesus, in other words, a mature disciple, would come as a surprise to many people attending church. Most people today come to church to feel good, not to learn how to die to self and bear a cross.

Discipleship is also essential to church growth because *only mature disciples reproduce themselves.*

My pastor husband often says, "Sheep have sheep, not the shepherd." The point he's making is that adult mature sheep have the babies. The shepherd's job is to nurture and grow sheep to maturity so the adult sheep can reproduce.

We'd think a shepherd a bit odd if he tried to grow his flock by building a big sheep pen and making it exciting so other sheep would desert their sheep pen and come over to his. We'd wonder what he was doing if he worked harder on advertising for other sheep to join his flock than on feeding his own so his sheep would grow to maturity and naturally increase the herd.

The analogies are obvious and the result is that it seems we've got some shepherds today with confused job descriptions. The changes have to start at the top with how churches and pastors view their job.

The changing job description of shepherds

What has happened in many churches in America today is that the measure of success for a church and its senior pastor in particular has shifted from the New Testament standard of a job description to develop mature disciples to a job description to increase attendance on Sunday morning. From a church plant anxious to an increase every week to a megachurch with national television coverage, Sunday morning numbers seem all important.

Sadly, we all fall into this. I was always angry with myself, when one of the first questions, I found myself asking a seminar attendee when I chatted with people before teaching on church communications was, "How big is your church?"

I find myself still doing that when I meet someone from another church.

There is a value in numbers in that we are called to win the world, but a focus on numbers alone is not the answer to building disciples or even ultimately to church growth because even if the pastor is energetic, hard-working, a great preacher, and wonderful at visitation, he or she cannot fully fulfill the Great Commission by simply adding numbers each week. With a big budget, a nonthreatening message and a charismatic personality, a pastor might pack an auditorium, but numbers on Sunday do not mean a church is fully fulfilling the Great Commission.

There is only one way to fully fulfill the Great Commission and it's what Jesus said to do: make disciples. A mature disciple by definition will reproduce other disciples, who will produce other disciples. It's the principle of multiplication vs. simple addition in church growth. Here's how it works—

Back to basics: multiplication vs. addition

When I was in college I was involved with Navigator ministry and our leaders constantly impressed on us the importance of growing a ministry through multiplication rather than addition. The lesson following applies to any ministry whether you are building a church or campus ministry.

LeRoy Eims, my college Nav group leader, again and again would show us a checkerboard pattern of squares. He'd explain how if you start on square one, if you add one grain of wheat a day for a month on each square, when you get to the end of 30 days, you'll have 30 grains of wheat. The same thing would happen if you really hustle in your Christian life. If you knock on lots of dormitory doors, do lots of evangelism, engage in debates, and work really hard, maybe you can add one person a day to the ministry and that would be 30 people added at the end of the month.

Not bad, we'd be tempted to think—but LeRoy wasn't finished.

Of course, he'd go on, you're so busy just adding new believers, you don't have much time to take care of the ones you added the day before, you just hope they are OK and you press on because you want to grow the ministry. You're willing to burn out for Jesus and you keep up that pace for months. You make it all through the school year working like crazy and at the end of 9 months you've got 280 people in your campus ministry. LeRoy was still not pleased. What's wrong with that, we'd wonder?

But there is another way to grow a ministry LeRoy would explain. Imagine what could happen, if instead of just adding one person a day, you added one person and then the two of you each added two, instead of simple addition, you'd see the power of multiplication.

The charts below illustrate this:

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	**30**

1	2	4	8	16
32	64	128	256	512
1,024	2,048	4,096	8,192	16,384
32,768	65,536	131,072	262,144	524,288
1,048,576	2,097,152	4,194,304	8,388,608	16,777,216
33,554,432	67,108,864	134,217,728	268,435,456	**536,870,912**

Obviously multiplication is a much more effective way to increase numbers than simple addition, but expecting a person to be a reproducing disciple in one day isn't realistic. More realistically, what if you took a month to intensely disciple that person: helping him or her study the Bible, learn to pray, get involved in church and a small group, learn share their faith? Though discipleship is a lifelong process, by the end of a month imagine your disciple in training is able to introduce one person to Jesus. If you do the same thing there are now 4 of you. The next month is spend on intensive discipleship involving 4 people with the expectation that each one introduces just one other person to Jesus during that month. Going into month 4, you've got 8 people.

Don't compare too soon

Helping people become mature disciples takes time getting people into God's word, praying with and for them—not tasks quickly accomplished.

Multiplication ministry can be discouraging if another campus minister or pastor of a church down the road is doing great job of addition ministry. At the end of 4 months the person inviting aggressively (or sending out a slick direct mail campaign) has 120 people coming to his or her church or campus ministry, you've got 8. Looking at the numbers at that point, could make you think what you are doing isn't working. Numbers are important—we are commanded to reach the world, but don't evaluate the numbers too soon. In multiplication ministry, your focus is on discipling—making sure that your people become mature and can lead others to Jesus. If you do that, the numbers will take care of themselves.

Needless to say, the chart on the next page is for illustration purposes only, but notice what happens at month 8. The church or other ministry doing addition is up to 240, but your slow and steady discipleship building process has reached 256 people. You're finally about even, but then things start to shift dramatically. At the church or ministry that continues to grow primarily by addition, unless they have added staff to keep growing the numbers, one person can only do so much. But at the multiplication church where a core value is that the Great Commission is to be fully fulfilled and every convert is discipled to reproducing maturity and expected to introduce other people to Jesus and to disciple them, no one person wears out. By month or year 10, the church or ministry growing by addition is at 300 (and 80% of all churches in American are less than this in size). The church or ministry that has been growing by discipleship is now at 1,024. To carry the illustration out 30 months, the addition church is at 900, and the multiplication church at 1,073,741,824.

This chart is obviously a challenge to illustrate contrasting processes—in a real world situation the actual growth of both groups will most likely be less. In churches that grow primarily by addition, the senior pastor is exhausted far short of gathering 900 members, and people who are never taught to get into God's Word and feed and care for themselves and others are bound to get frustrated if their needs aren't continuously met and will wander off to another church with a more interesting pastor and praise service.

In churches that grow by multiplication a variety of issues can enter in to keep the church from reaching its full potential. Not everyone has the time or interest to become a disciple. Cross-bearing, sacrifice, self-discipline and the reality of living as if we truly believe that our best life isn't now, but in heaven, is a tough sell in America today.

Tough sell or not, growing people to mature discipleship is the command given to the church if we are to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

A mathematical comparison of methods of growth

Though real-life situations would obviously be different, this chart illustrates the significance of developing disciples who can reproduce themselves—growth by multiplication, as opposed to adding bodies to the church—growth by addition.

Month or year	Growth by Addition	Growth by Multiplication
1	30	2
2	60	4
3	90	8
4	120	16
5	150	32
6	180	64
7	210	128
8	240	256
9	280	512
10	300	1,024
11	330	2,048
12	360	4,096
13	390	8,192
14	420	16,384
15	450	32,768
16	480	65,536
17	510	131,072
18	540	262,144
19	570	524,288
20	600	1,048,576
21	630	2,097,152
22	660	4,194,304
23	690	8,388,608
24	720	16,777,216
25	750	33,554,432
26	780	67,108,864
27	810	134,217,728
28	840	268,435,456
29	870	536,870,912
30	900	1,073,741,824

Make it practical

My plan for helping churches fully fulfill the Great Communications through their church communications is explained in my *Five Steps of Effective Church Communication & Marketing* in the article that follows and is fleshed out in the many other resources available through my ministry website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Good communication is essential, but it is not the only thing needed. Staff commitment, prayer, time, money, vision—so many things go into the makeup of a Great Commission fulfilling church. Church communications aren't everything, but it has been my experience from observing thousands of churches and their publications from over two decades of church communication teaching that a church can have the greatest vision and programs in place, but if they are not communicated well, nothing much happens. A vision that stays inside the heads and hearts of the pastor and staff and isn't communicated isn't a vision, it's a fantasy.

A vision that stays inside the heads and hearts of the pastor and staff and isn't communicated isn't a vision, it's a fantasy.

I am quite certain that my suggestions are not the only or the final answer. They are offered as part of the solution, but Lord willing, a useful part. A guiding inspiration for my ministry is the example of the children of Israel when they rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah.

He records as they rebuilt the wall (a picture of how we are building up the church today in fulfillment of the Great Commission) how various people worked on a section of the wall directly in front of their home. Nobody had the responsibility to build the whole thing, but when each group did their part, the wall got built. Church communications is my section of the wall. Good communications isn't the only requirement for building up the Church, but I hope through my training and resources to do all I can to help you make this part of the wall strong as you build your church of disciples and fully fulfill the Great Commission our Lord gave us.

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications and Marketing

Many churches today in their communications and marketing ministries do a great job of starting to obey the Great Commission. Through colorful PR campaigns and professional worship experiences, they bring folks in on Sunday mornings. However, few churches have equal success fully fulfilling the Great Commission which includes the command to make disciples and teach them to observe all Jesus commanded.

Though there are many factors that contribute to this situation, the one this booklet can help with is to recognize and begin to correct the failure in most churches to intentionally create the number and variety of church communications needed to move people from unchurched to Christian maturity. Following are some suggestions on how to remedy this situation and enable your church to do all Jesus commanded.

Recommit to fully fulfill the Great Commission

We have the tools today in technology, computer hardware and software, in people power, in low-cost printing and production, to do anything imaginable in communications and marketing to powerfully share the gospel message. Our problem is not in our tools, but in our hearts.

The problem is in our hearts because in the same way that, "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" so too, what we believe in our heart of hearts is what will be reflected in our communications. As I travel all over North America, doing my seminars and talking to people in churches, it would appear most church communication ministries do not intentionally work to fully fulfill the Great Commission because they don't see communications ministry as a vital part of that task throughout the entire process. They use communications to accomplish the first part, but not all of it. It appears, from the majority of publications that I see that most church communicators believe their work is done if people get into the church building.

What we produce reflects our priorities and our theology

I've come to that conclusion because when I look at the communication samples that people show me from their churches, they almost always consist primarily of outreach PR: flyers, postcards, etc. for all ages, kids to adult, the Sunday morning bulletin, and sometimes a church newsletter. Sometimes churches have brochures about various programs in the church and sometimes there is denominational or local "what we believe" information. Many churches today have a website, but most websites are primarily brochureware about meeting times, location, staff and programs. There is nothing wrong with these ministry communications. In fact, most are well-done and wonderfully accomplish their communication purposes, but they are not enough.

They get people into the church, they provide information about the basic activities of the church. The publications accomplish the "go" part of the Great Commission. They are good at getting the message out there, but I seldom see any ministry communications, either in print or online that intentionally work to develop disciples.

If we aren't developing disciples, this we aren't fully obeying Jesus. We have to recommit to fully fulfill Jesus' command in the Great Commission, not to simply get people inside the church doors, but to help them become mature disciples. Our burning desire must become like that of the Apostle Paul's in Colossians 1:28, where he said, "Him we preach and proclaim, warning and admonishing everyone and instructing everyone in all wisdom (comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God), that we may present every person mature (full-grown, fully initiated, complete, and perfect) in Christ (the Anointed One)" (Amplified Bible).

When that is the core desire of our hearts, we will be motivated to create church communications that will help accomplish that goal. *(note: for more on the importance of developing disciples and why that is essential for the growth and survival, see the article "Why discipleship is essential for the church to survive" just before this article, if you didn't read it already.)*

Turn ministry motivation into action

It takes more than one or two publications to support all the steps needed to move people from being outside the church to fully devoted followers of Christ. I've defined the following five communication tasks, which will be explained shortly, as essential to move people from initial outreach to mature disciples. The following five tasks can obviously tie in with the various models of church growth including the five steps of Christian growth in the Purpose-Driven model, the Willow-Creek model of Christian growth, and others in many denominations.

Though in my seminars and through other materials (lots of free articles and tips on my website, www.effectivechurchcom.com) I develop these communication tasks in more detail and provide additional how-tos in creation and production of the communications, I have found it very helpful for pastors and other ministry leaders to at least look at a list of all the ministry communications their church needs to create to fully fulfill the Great Commission. You obviously can't create everything all at once, but I hope this brief list expands your vision of the amount of materials you need to create to grow your people to Christian maturity.

Following is a brief overview of the Five Steps including the name of the step, the task of that step, and a brief description of some of the communications that comprise it. After this article is a chart that summarizes the Five Steps.

Additional important introductory notes:

1. On the chart under each step I have the term "Print & Digital Versions." We live in a time of multi-channel communications, which means that to reach our world we must use every available channel from postcards to podcasts; from flyers to flash-driven websites—whatever we can and whatever works. One isn't better or more effective or useful—we need to make use of every channel we can. It is not a time of either/or, but both/and. Not every congregation needs every method, but there are few groups that need only one.

2. Every suggestion must be culturally appropriate to **your** audience. By culture, I mean everything that makes your community and congregation unique from the age group to ethnic mix to local interests and popular media. I can make sugges-tions, and I hope help you think through some implications and ideas, but you know your people best, always create your communications with them in mind and tailor everything you to appeal to them. Also, always be aware of the people skills and tools available in your church and work realistically with them in mind.

3. Always be who you are. Don't try to make your communications look like those from any other church and be cautious in the use of slick, pre-done, nationally sold pieces. Don't be guilty of bait and switch where you send out some slick, fancy piece if you're a little church plant meeting in a basement. Big, glossy and professional is not always more appealing—many people are looking for a real, intimate, and honest interaction about God.

4. Do not confuse relevancy for irreverence. We serve a holy God. There is tendency today for some in church communications to use shocking or flippant advertising with the excuse of making the church appeal to the unchurched. You can be relevant, contemporary and up-to-date while still upholding the holiness of our Lord. Jesus was contemporary and sometimes confrontational, but he was never irreverent—pray for discernment to reflect him in all you create in church communications.

The Five Essential Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing

Step #1: INVITE

Task: To invite people; to simply get them into the church or to attend a church-involved or sponsored activity. Your communications don't have to do or explain too much, just get folks there.

Communications that invite people to your church include: business and invitation cards, postcards, flyers, door-hangers, direct mail, outreach oriented parts of your website. Developing a logo and identity package are often a foundational steps here.

Step #2: INFORM

Task: once you get people there, you need to inform people in complete, clear, and caring ways what is going on at the worship or church event they are attending and what else is going on in the church.

Communications that inform people include: church bulletins, PowerPoint presentations, introductory brochures, communication with visitors, visitor packets all fit in here. Departmental sections (youth, children's, singles' and similar sections) on your website and in print materials.

Additional notes about this step: This step is incredibly important because studies show approximately 70% of people who visit our churches do not return and I believe the communications we give folks when they visit has quite a lot to do with this. Think about it: often, the first piece of Christian literature an un-churched person sees is your church bulletin—and what does it say to them? (For much more on this topic, read my book: *Church Bulletins, how to create and use them to touch and change lives* which is available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn). In addition, typically, most church communication ministries drop off considerably after this step and this is where we should just be getting started in developing a continuing relationship with people.

Step #3: INCLUDE

Task: For people to grow in the faith, they need to be included in more than Sunday morning. It is vital, if people are to mature, that the church communications actively include them in more than the worship service. At this step the

church communications shifts from primarily external-focused communications and marketing to internal communications and marketing. The most deadly phrase that can kill off communications at this point is: "Oh, everybody knows." They don't. To get your people growing spiritually, you have to continuously communicate to them what the church office and staff knows.

Communications that include people consist of: the overall church newsletter and ministry brochures that take people to the next step of involvement; PR for small groups, maps, small group descriptions; communications with the intentional purpose of moving people into activities in addition to worship service attendance are important here. Web supported calendars, reminder emails, web-based explanations of programs and PR are also important here.

Step #4: INSTRUCT

Task: Once you get them to an event outside Sunday morning, you need to teach them something if they are to grow in their Christian life. This church communication function is often lacking in churches today. People do not grow up in the faith and become mature disciples without intentional training and often this training requires a volume of support communication materials seldom produced today.

Communication that instruct people include: Bible class outlines, teaching materials, take-home study guides, list of verses, memory verse card materials, quizzes, adult and youth Sunday School quarterlies, teaching handouts. Web-based, in-depth discussion guides, reference materials, referral articles; web blogs on important topics, discussion rooms, question opportunities.

Step #5: INSPIRE

Task: Communication at this step goes beyond the "feel good" aspects of inspiration to inspire people with a passion to reach out to a lost world and to live lives of unselfish devotion to Jesus. These communications include things like the brochures, web entries, lists and flyers that form the tangible, touchable, communication of how to help at the Rescue mission, the list of what is needed at the women's center, and the schedule for the Habitat build. These are the publications that link inspiration with action.

Communications that inspire include: Brochures that explain mission and outreach opportunities, that clarify qualifications and training. They can also include things like a refrigerator magnet created by and given to class members from a Sunday School class teacher that reminds them every time they open the refrigerator: "Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." Web-based ministry opportunities and links also fit in here.

Creating church communications that will change lives *is* a huge task

As you look over the list and the chart following this article it is easy to become discouraged—there is so much to do in our church communication ministry if it is to truly be a tool to fully fulfill the Great Commission. But in this area, as in many others, though Jesus never promised us that Christian ministry would be easy, he did promise, "in this world you will have tribulation," but in the same passage, he also said, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

When we are working to communicate for Jesus, we can be assured we have his help.

With his help, YOU can do everything that is needed

In my ministry, I not only want to challenge you to see the overview of what needs to be done in the communications ministry of a church as the Five Steps outline, but I also want to equip and encourage you to know that **YOU and those in your church can do ALL of the tasks required.**

There are many groups that want to sell churches all sorts of communication services today, in logo design, print, website services, etc. Many of them are wonderful folks and do a great job. At the same time, I find it incredibly irritating for various websites and books to give you all sorts of advice, when the primary underlying message is that those of you who actually work in the church aren't capable of doing what they recommend and so you need a "professional" to do it for you. Maybe. But reality for most churches is that they cannot afford "professional" communications help and in most cases, I truly believe, they don't need it.

There are so many training resources available (if you need to learn how to use software, check out www.lynda.com; it is inexpensive and fantastic). There are many people in your church with tremendous creative gifts, sometimes you simply need to put them together. I've got lots of training materials, how-tos and advice, much of it free on my website and the rest at very low cost. My goal is for the people in your church to be able to do all the communications work in your church that needs to be done.

Some of you may think, "Well, the people in my church won't do as "professional" of a job as some big company." True, maybe not. But maybe it will better reflect YOUR church, not the style of the big company. And maybe some creative people in your church might just surprise you with what they can create with a little bit of training and encouragement.

In addition, you may be able to afford a professionally produced postcard or banner or some other piece (and there are times that might be exactly what you need), but there is no way any church can afford to have someone else produce all of the materials needed to promote all the ministries of the church in the way they need to be promoted. Every department needs people producing communications in print and online with the goal of not just getting people into the programs, but of growing them to maturity in their faith.

The Great Commission comes with a Great Promise

Growing people to maturity in their Christian faith and creating a comprehensive program of communications to enable your church to do that is a huge task, but not an impossible one. The Lord that gave us the command to win the world to him, also gave us the promise, "I am with you, always."

When your communications responsibilities seem overwhelming, look away from the computer. Look at the sky; touch a flower; take a child's hand. The Lord who made all those things, is the one who is with you as you create communications that will fully fulfill his Great Commission.

On the next page is a chart that summarizes the
Five Steps of Effective Church Communication and Marketing.
You have my permission to make copies of it
to pass around to your church staff and communication volunteers.

The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing
to help churches create communications that will fully fulfill the Great Commission

TASK	Target Audience	Marketing Strategy	Ministry Goals	Key Communications
				Far from exhaustive, the practical tools that will help move people from one step to the next.
Step #1 INVITE	Unchurched people Visitors **Community**	**See**	Identify the church Unchurched into the church Become regular attenders **Evangelism**	**Print & Digital Versions** Identity pieces: logos, business cards, stationary, signage; Outreach: invitation cards, postcards, ads, door-hangers, tracts; Outreach support publications; Signage. Websites, emails, video, podcasts.
Step #2 INFORM	Visitors Regular Attendees **Crowd**	**Sample**	Personal Salvation Learn about the Church Join the Church **Worship**	**Print & Digital Versions** Bulletins & Bulletin Inserts; Visitor & Prayer Cards; Visitor & Member Communications; Gospel Presentations, Doctrinal & Denominational Literature; Church Overviews; Overall Church Newsletters. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking
Step #3 INCLUDE	Church Members Committed 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 networking
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 networking
Step #5 INSPIRE	Leaders,Workers, Key Volunteers Church Staff: professional, bi-vocational & lay **Core**	**Sell**	Ongoing Service & Outreach Lifestyle & Church Ministry Consistent Giving Missions Ivolvement **Ministry**	**Print & Digital Versions** Volunteer & Staff: recruitment, training, affirmation; Equipping publications; Encouraging & Inspiring materials; Financial publications; Missions involvement and support. Websites, emails, video, podcasts, social networking

Core Components of Effective Church Communications

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

Incarnation—a continuing challenge and model for church communication

"The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

The ethereal became earthly, the intangible became touchable when Jesus became flesh and blood. In a similar way, your church communications help make the intangible realities of your church flesh and blood in the lives of the people in your church and those you want to reach. A grief recovery workshop helps no one until the materials announcing it are created and responded to. The greatest youth program involves no one until postcards and email inform the teenagers of the dates, times, and locations of meetings. The most inspiring conference helps no one if the church is empty because no one took time to promote it professionally and prayerfully.

To help our communications be effective in making the message of Christianity tangible and touchable in our world today, let's look at the Incarnation, at Jesus becoming flesh and blood, for inspiration on ways to lead and to make our communications real and response-producing in the lives of people we want to reach.

Incarnation lesson: Communicate in a form that connects with the people you want to reach for Jesus.

Jesus did that—he came in a form that connected with the sinners he wanted to reach. He was born to an ordinary family, from an unremarkable town. He practiced a common trade.

He didn't have to do that. He could have been born into the High Priest's family; he could have come as a king or a wealthy landowner. He didn't. He came as a common man.

He looked like the people he preached to, talked like them, had fun with them. He came as one of the guys. You probably couldn't pick him out in a crowd when he was growing up. He fit in with the people around him so well, his detractors used his very ordinariness against him, "Isn't this just the carpenters son?" they mocked.

Incarnation application:

What is the communication form that connects with the people you want to reach?

The issue isn't how can you write so that your seminary professor would be impressed or how much money can you spend on a commercially produced postcard so people will think you are a church that cares about "excellence." Instead, what will connect with the people you are trying to reach?

Ask, don't assume

If the communications you are creating are primarily for outreach, so some research before you simply assume you know the best way to communicate. Take some time and do an informal survey of your specific, target audience and ask how they hear about events they attend. Be prepared for some surprises.

For example, one young couple wanted to start a church in a beach community.

Their target audience wasn't exactly the type to cruise the religion section of the Saturday paper and study church ads. Instead, they found one of the best ways to advertise their church was to create posters similar to the ones bands created and posted all over town.

Jesus wasn't what people expected and he didn't do things in traditional ways so don't be afraid to try something new for your audience.

Never stop asking your people what works for them. If you aren't having the response to worthwhile events and spiritual growth opportunities at your church, you've most likely got a communication issue. Everyone on staff knows what is going on, they planned and prayed about it for months—but without effective communication to your people, no matter how great your program, it won't change lives.

Again, don't assume the best way to reach your people, ask them.

Do a little survey some Sunday morning in church that asks folks how they want to be informed about events or news from the church. Have them fill it out and turn it in immediately. This is the only way a survey will work. To ask people to take it home and fill it out or to mail them something and expect them to fill it out and return it to the church is an exercise in futility.

For detailed instruction, examples, and forms to use for tracking, please see the Course on Planning on www.effectivechurchcom.com and the book: A new way to plan, measure and evaluate church communications, Big is busted; try tiny! *available at: www.lulu.com/yvonprehn.*

A half sheet of 8 1/2 x 11 inserted in their bulletin that everyone can take out, quickly fill in and put into the offering works well. Give your people a choice of communication methods: email, web-posting, postcards, newsletter, in the bulletin, podcast, text message, whatever. Have them check all that they read or respond to and have them rank their favorite. Ask for open ended comments on how you can better communicate. The answers will be different for every church. Listen to your folks. Try things. Track results. Take time to find out what communication forms best incarnate the message of your ministry to your people.

This kind of a survey is especially important in our transitional time of church communication. Today some people check their email every fifteen minutes and others in your church do not and assert they will never go online. Unless you know how your people take in information and what they prefer, you may spend many unproductive hours in staff meetings arguing about what is better: to communicate via email or postcards or if you still need both. You won't know the answer until your survey your people. Realize also that preferences change and commit to doing a survey like this at least once a year to be sure that you are staying in touch with the preferred communication channels for your people.

Tracking is also important because sometimes what people say they want isn't what they respond to the best. To track effectiveness, for similar events, for example, one time send out a postcard, next time send out an email, a third time send both. Track attendance for all three events and you should learn something about what is effective in reaching your people.

Never lose track of the sheep

Asking and tracking are vitally important because often people making church communication decisions are on the cutting edge in their skills and interests in technology. It is easy for people in this position to assume everyone has their interest in and ability to access technology, but this is seldom the case. In a church located in Redmond Washington (arguably one of the technology centers of the

world, home of Microsoft), the communications leader of a large church told me they were quitting their paper-based newsletter because they now had almost 60% of the people in the congregation reading it online. He was quite excited because he loved doing the online version. When I expressed concern that by his own statistics that meant almost half of the congregation would not get the church news, I could tell I was quickly put into the category of old lady who doesn't understand technology.

Technology understanding has little to do with these kinds of decisions, they are primarily pastoral ones. Never forget that if you are a leader in your church, your first duty is to pastor (care for, nurture, feed and lead) your people, not wow them with cutting edge innovations. Innovation is great and fun, but it should never come before the needs of the "least" in your congregation. The good shepherd goes after the one sheep who is lost. The good pastoral leader makes sure communications go out in forms (usually a variety is needed) so that all the sheep get the message.

Incarnation lesson: Even the best message needs repetition

Don't expect shortcuts in results just because your message is from God.

Jesus didn't spring full-grown from his mother's body as some of the mythological Greek gods purportedly did. He grew up like any other child and took just as long to become an adult as his friends did. He preached for three years and slowly built up a following of disciples. He repeated the same message quite a few times, in many situations and in many ways.

Sometimes leaders in Christian ministry birth a vision of what they want their ministry or church to be and they want their church or people to catch the vision and respond NOW. In the churches I've worked with, I've seen this approach when churches create a splashy, expensive advertisement and run it once or spend lots of money on a pre-printed 4-color postcard mailing and send out only one because that is all they can afford. Or they announce some volunteer or ministry opportunity once or twice from the pulpit with great passion. Invariably they are disappointed when people don't flock to the program they spent so much money on advertising. Or they ignore the call to volunteer. In both situations the leader is discouraged.

They shouldn't be. Jesus had to go through a long, repetitive process to grow His disciples and we can't expect to do less. Again and again he had to repeat lessons and demonstrate actions. Up to the week of his death they were still jockeying about who would be the greatest after they heard numerous lessons and rebukes about who was the greatest among them. But Jesus didn't berate them; one more time he patiently communicated the lesson of servant leadership when he got up from the table, took water and a towel and washed their feet.

Incarnation application:

In communications, the quick fix seldom works.

For church communications to produce the sustained response and life-change the greatest impact usually takes place over a long period of time and with many communication projects as you are consistent in your message to your people.

For one-time events, marketing theory today tells us people need to hear and see the same message, in the same form at least SEVEN times for it to sink in at all. Even more is needed to really make a memory impact. In practical terms, that

means one ad or mailing, no matter how much you spend on it makes virtually no impact at all. Repetition, repetition, repetition is what works. Decide on your message and repeat it in the bulletin, newsletter, email, with a postcard, a flyer, a bulletin insert, web calendar, online newsletter, email and follow-up phone calls.

Remember also that not everyone will see your message each time you get it out there. With many people having to work on Sunday these days, statistically only about twenty percent of your congregation will be there every Sunday. Many people can come only one or two Sundays a month. It isn't that they don't care, that is just life today. The communications reality is that for many of your people, if you advertise or announce something only in the bulletin, many will never see it. If you rely on a mailing, what if the person sorting the mail tosses it before the intended audience sees it? What if the spam filter on someone's computer kicks out your email before it's opened? Not everything you produce will get to the intended audience.

That is why a variety of methods is critical—sending out postcards, email, putting it on your website—today you need to repeat as many times as you can through as many channels as you can to reach people effectively.

Incarnation lesson: Incarnation-inspired communication is never easy

For three years Jesus was a homeless, itinerant preacher who ended up being crucified. As we follow His steps, don't expect people to always be grateful for the communications work you pour your heart into. There will always be people who will complain "I didn't know about that; nobody ever tells me what's happening" and others who will tell you, "I got sick of hearing about that event, doesn't the staff have something better to do with their time and money?"

As a leader in the communications ministry of your church, you must be prepared for this and you must not allow negative people to set your communications agenda. They will always be there; they will often be quite vocal and persistent; they will often be some of the significant donors to the church. We can't determine their motivation which will vary from just sheer petty meanness to genuine concern, but we can't let them deter our communication ministry any more than Jesus allowed Peter to deter his mission when Peter, out of genuine, but misguided love, told Jesus not to talk about the cross. Jesus didn't listen to Peter. He rebuked him and pressed ahead with God's plan for his life.

You've got to do that as a church communication leader. Determine you will do all you need to do with both high tech and low tech to incarnate the eternal message of the gospel to your people. Like Jesus, you can expect that though you may not receive praise as you work, if you incarnate the message of Jesus as well as you can, if you communicate and repeat it often in a variety of ways, people will spend eternity in Heaven. That's why Jesus became incarnate; and that should be your goal as you incarnate his message.

You've got one of the hardest ministry assignments—so get spiritual support

Though your job in communications is often invisible in the successes of the churches you serve, you hold strategic positions in the unseen battles for the kingdom of God. You are the communication center for your church or ministry.
In any war, effective communication is of primary importance.

During a recent church seminar, a senior pastor commented that working on a church brochure project was one of the most difficult things he had ever done. It wasn't just the difficulty of the skills required—he was a good writer and had a good eye for design—it was the spiritual warfare involved.

I really appreciated his comments because they reinforced a message that I am constantly reminding folks who do church communications work which is—You are on the front lines of spiritual warfare and you must take the spiritual aspects of your work seriously.

Once again when the U.S. attacked in the Middle East, some of the first targets taken out were "communications centers." In any war if you knock out the communications resources of the enemy, you cripple the enemy. It is the same in the warfare for the hearts and souls of humanity.

As a Christian church communicator you are doing critical tasks for the Kingdom of God and the resources you need to do them go beyond having a good computer and software if you are to stay strong and be successful in this spiritual warfare. As a leader in the communications ministry of church you need to recognize this reality for yourself and communicate this reality to your people.

Suggestions for ways to increase your spiritual resources and strength for the tasks ahead:

Recognize yourself how important your work is in the spiritual realms. Communications work is NOT simply a secular task that just happens to take place in the church.

Remember, "You wrestle not against flesh and blood (in your case printers and computers)." As the Phillip's translation goes on to say, "It is against organizations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil" (Eph. 6:12).

No army can function well without good communication. Objectives need to be communicated clearly, instructions given, plans explained, recruitment made successful. You are engaged in battle for the eternal souls of people.

Because your work overseeing communications ministry is so important, don't be surprised if you get attacked and prepare your people doing church communications to expect sometimes unkind remarks also.

There will be days working on communications projects that you will be discouraged, sad, and frustrated. All the hard work will seem like it accomplishes nothing and you will be amazed at the discouraging thoughts that will go through your mind. Don't be discouraged! Remind yourself that the depths of your discouragement reflect the incredible importance of what you are doing. Stand up and fight and take on this part of your job with excitement and enthusiasm. If you aren't excited about your church communication ministry, your people won't be.

Remember also that Satan is the accuser of the brethren and one of his favorite ways to weaken the impact of your church communication ministry is to get you fighting with each other. Don't do his work for him. One of the most challenging areas that can spark disagreement in the church is communications. It is amazing the disagreements that can take place over bulletin inserts, choice of clipart, who should update the website and what should

be on it. Calmly discuss these issues, but keep focused on your objectives of helping people to come to know Jesus and grow in their Christian lives. To do that effectively in your communications, do all you can to maintain peace in the church office.

Remind your communications team, that today with the variety of audiences and tools we have there is NO perfect way to communicate. A variety of methods and channels always works best. What appeals to one audience in the church seldom appeals to everyone. This is why a team and a variety of approaches is always useful.

Don't argue, test and tract effectiveness. (check out: *A new way to plan, measure and evaluate church communications, Big is busted; try tiny!* at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn, for more ideas on this and copies of charts to use for tracking.)

Ask for prayer for your communication ministry and the people doing it. In many churches, the up-front people, primarily the pastor and worship leader, are the ones who get the public requests for prayer. While that is very important, the folks in the office producing the tremendous amount of communications materials that support the ministry need prayer also.

Some suggestions of what to pray for and what to ask others to pray about include: personal health and safety as your communication ministry folks do their work; adequate equipment and the time needed to use it; protection from equipment breakdowns and glitches; peace and good working relationships in the ministry office; wisdom to design and write in a way that will touch hearts, meet needs and bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Pray that the people doing the communications work will have clear minds, creativity and empathy as they create communications ministry tools. Pray for joy as they do their work and an eternal perspective for the effect it can have on others lives.

Remember to give thanks in all things. As a church communications leader, again, you set the tone. You are doing work in church communications that will change lives for eternity. You have tools available today that can accomplish communication tasks that were unimaginable a generation ago. Remind your people that to whom much is given, much is required and that you have a world to reach and the ability to do it. It is an exciting time to be communicating for the Kingdom of God and thank God each day for the joy of being able to do it.

Spend time with your commanding general

It's hard to stay strong in battle if you aren't sure what is going on or if you doubt victory. In church communications leadership as well as every other part of leading in your church, to be strong, you've got to stay close to Jesus. Your leadership, your strength, your joy will be a direct reflection of your time with Him. Be sure you are consistent in your Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, witnessing and service and then you will have the kind of life that inspires your people as they work to communicate the message of the gospel.

Technological resources are important, but far more important are your spiritual resources. Make them a priority and as Matt. 6:33 says, "everything else will be yours as well."

Responsibility and understanding are required to lead the communications ministry of your church

The communication ministry in many churches runs on auto-pilot. Often the printed communications and the web site are produced without planning or accountability and little input from church leadership. Often continuing communications are created "because we've always done them this way." New publications are created and websites updated to reflect the demands of the urgent without thoughtful planning. *An event is coming up, announce it! Money needs to be raised—send out a letter! Registrations taken, and oh, yes, PR for the retreat—get something, anything out there on it!*

Because of this sort of approach, most communication programs in churches generate lots of activity and spend significant amounts of money without measurable results.

If you are a leader and decision maker for church communications, whether you are a pastor, church business administrator, staff member or volunteer, determine to take responsible leadership of the communications and marketing ministries of your church instead of simply allowing them to happen. Following are some suggestions on how to do that:

Overcome a lack of understanding of how communications are produced

The scenario for the creation of many communication and marketing projects in the church reminds me a bit of the old Star Trek Next Generation television series. In every episode, Captain Picard would sit in his chair, issue a command and end with the words, "Make it so." Whatever he wanted, happened without Picard moving a muscle.

In a similar way an order is given often from a person of authority in the church to create a communication piece that can be used both in print and on the web. The leader sees something he or she likes, often at a church conference that was created by a megachurch with extraordinary resources. The leaders takes the great-looking piece back to church ministry assistant or communications creator and basically says, "Make it so—on the web and on print—and by tomorrow morning."

The ministry assistant or communications creator tries hard to fulfill the order. That person is often used to doing the impossible without complaining, and just how hard can a 4-color brochure or moving parts on the website be, they might initially think. But without the needed software, time to learn or use it, or even a computer that could handle the required complexity, optimism has its limits. One project or the other or maybe both does not turn out the way the leader expected. Frustration and disappointment and sometimes tears and accusations are often the result.

Many church leaders forget that the world of communication production in the church isn't TV and they aren't Capt. Picard. Just because a leader wants something done a certain way or to look a certain way it may not be possible with the equipment and software, in addition to the training and skills of people, available at your church.

Attitudes need to change before communications can change

This is a serious situation and for change to come in the practical areas of budgeting for software, hardware and training below are some suggested changes that need to take place in leadership and staff attitudes about communication.

Realize they don't teach pastors and church leaders communication production skills in seminary: Many pastors think that by assuming the leadership of the church they should know everything about everything that goes on in the church. For many pastors, the computer wasn't even invented when they went to seminary. Even for those who grew up with the computer, using it to create research papers doesn't prepare you for what's needed to create publications for print and the web.

Realize that if someone is good at verbal communication, which most pastors are, does not mean you are also a written or web communication expert. If a pastor or church leader does not have *personal* experience using a particular software program or if they have not by themselves created a publication like the one they are asking for, they often have NO idea what they are asking for. Creating communications on paper and on the web is complex, difficult, time-consuming work. Just because a leader wants something done a certain way or to look a certain way it may not be possible with the equipment and software available at the church.

To build a house, you need expert blueprints; you need workers skilled in using the tools; and you need a foreman overseeing the entire process to make certain things are done in the proper order. You don't just bring a picture torn out of a magazine to your local carpenter, hand it to him with the newest power saw and hammer and inform him that you want a house built just like this picture by next week. That is similar to what a pastor is doing when he or she takes a publication some other church created successfully (and most often they picked up at a conference), plops it on the ministry assistant's desk and tells that person he want something like that done ASAP.

It rarely works. But unlike the situation with building the house where the carpenter would tell you that you're crazy and things can't be done that way, in the church the culture is such that often the ministry assistant doesn't say a word. She may be dying inside, but she'll try her best. But there are some projects that a servant heart and a willing spirit just can't accomplish.

A much better option would be to sit down with the person creating communications either in print or on the web and say things like: "I saw this and really liked it. Can we do something like this? What would it take to do something similar? Realistically how long would it take? Do you have the software, hardware, training to do it? Who could we ask to help?"

Master understanding, not execution

Leaders, don't misunderstand here—before you initiate conversations like the one above realize you do not have to know HOW to do all of the tasks in your communications ministry to lead wisely in this area, BUT you should have a good understanding of the time, skills and resources needed to accomplish these tasks. If the senior pastor or church leaders do not understand what is involved in creating communications with desktop publishing or multi-media and web creation, all kinds of problems take

place in misunderstanding, in confusing and frustrating expectations, and in budget allocation.

To understand these areas, take some time with your the staff creating the communications and have them demonstrate various tasks.

For example, sit with your church secretary and observe how long it takes to turn scribbled notes and unintelligible messages into the Sunday bulletin. When you see how much time it takes to layout a page (even with the "easiest" software) and how much additional work it takes when she has to insert a last minute item, you'll become more sympathetic to the importance of firm deadlines and no last minute changes.

Watch your multimedia person put together the background slides for the worship music. Observe the process of getting digital camera images into PowerPoint, or the newsletter or on the web site. Stick with it until you have a good sense of the time, effort and costs it takes to accomplish various communication technology tasks. What looks effortless and is over in 60 seconds when it is presented can take inordinate amounts of time and effort. If you understand this, it can help you plan projects much more effectively and help you to know realistically what to expect from your people.

Ask questions, such as, "If we did this or that, how much time would it take? Do we have the capability to do this?" Sometimes the answers are surprising and with the computer what appears easy may be incredibly difficult and what appears complex may be very simple—but you won't know until you ask somewhat who is actually doing the work and watch them do it.

If you understand what it take to do your current projects, you'll have a better idea what it takes to do more complex ones.

After making similar suggestions at one of my seminars a pastor friend of my called me and said, "Thanks so much for encouraging my secretary to tell me what a jerk I am." I protested that I didn't say that, and he went on, "No, she didn't really say that, but I had very unrealistic expectations of what she was able to do and the difficulty of her assigned tasks. I almost lost a very good secretary and friend because I didn't understand."

Make your church communications accountable

Don't just master understanding, turn people lose with fun projects and walk away. Church communications and marketing projects on paper and on the web take a lot of time and cost a lot of money. What kind of return are you getting on that investment? If you don't know, and most churches I talk to don't, you need to start finding that out.

Institute a system to measure effectiveness of your communication program. One way to do it might be to create a spreadsheet where on one axis you list the various methods you employ to market and get people involved in a ministry: the bulletin, bulletin inserts, the newsletter, web site, post cards, follow up letters, email, etc. (see www.effectivechurchcom.com for video on FORMS that illustrates this chart and how to use it). On another axis, list various events: newcomers class, small group leadership training, Valentines Outreach Party, etc.

Then mark on the spreadsheet how many times you advertised the event and using which communication tools. Add up the total exposures and record how many people came to the event.

After a few months you should start to see some trends that will help you in your communication planning. For example, if you might note that when you advertised the Mom's Morning Out in the bulletin and on the Sunday morning PowerPoint you got 8 responses. Then you created an invitation card that simply summarized the details of what you were doing, when, where and why folks should attend. You then gave out dozens of cards to the leaders and instructed them to hand out the cards to friends and to women with kids that they would meet in grocery store lines and at parks. When you note that after creating the cards and equipping your people with them your response went up to 80 women attending—this tells you something about the effectiveness of one kind of communication—in this case, a simple, business card-sized invitation card. (This is actually what happened to one of the attendees at my seminars).

Regarding your web site, do you know how many people visit it each day? Do you have any idea where the visitors come from, who they are or what sections they go to? Talk to your web host for statistics and review them regularly and modify your site based on them.

One growing church in Texas found that over 50% of the new members of their church came to the church initially because of their web site. They intentionally worked to make the web site one that answered the questions of unchurched people instead of being a site that primarily featured the church schedule. Because they tracked the results they were able to continuously modify their web site to meet the needs of the people they wanted to reach.

Have a proper measure for excellence and success

In many churches publications are considered excellent if they look good and are free from typos and grammatical and spelling mistakes. While these are admirable goals, they are not ultimately a good measure for success of ministry publications.

There are really only two measures that really matter: The first one is: Are people coming to know Jesus as Savior? The second one is: Are your people growing to maturity in their faith?

These things don't happen if your communications aren't bringing people into the church, involving them the activities and ministries of the church and supporting and reinforcing what they are learning.

You have incredibly powerful communication tools available for your use—take charge of them and intentionally use them to more effectively and responsibly share the gospel message and help people grow in their faith.

A Leadership Summit lesson and suggested application for church communicators

At the end of the 2006 Willow Creek Association, Leadership Summit, Bill Hybels closed with this challenge: "We will give an account for what we did with this message. We don't have a product. Are we doing our best to convey this message because it is the only message that can redirect an eternity. Get the message clear; get the message out there." (please see note at the end of article concerning quotes).

This was only one of the challenges presented during the conference that touched on the importance of communications ministry in the church. There were many other references to the importance of communications, because it is impossible to be a good leader if you aren't a good communicator.

Communication is a key skill for leaders

A leader can have incredible vision and drive, but if he or she does not communicate that vision to their church or ministry, action isn't taken and lives aren't changed. Good communication is a core, foundational skill for a leader. There is no such thing as a great leader who can't communicate. Whether the leader personally works on their communication or whether another person or team else has the responsibility to communicate for the leader, this is a an essential area for growth and skill development for anyone in church leadership.

With these thoughts in mind, I felt it would be useful to share one of Bill Hybels messages in summary form, along with my suggested applications to church communicators. Please be aware that I am leaving out huge amounts of very helpful and inspirational material—at the end of this article I have the link for a complete DVD of not only this one, but the other Leadership Summit presentations.

Message: The Life Cycle of a Leader by Bill Hybels

In this presentation, Hybels referred to the well-known life cycle of products. Everything has a life cycle he said and then he went on to define the life cycle of a leader in this way:

#1: Early 20's : a heart full on for God, huge enthusiasm and passion

#2: 30's or so: a time when passion is no longer enough, skill must be added and an infrastructure built

#3: Age varies: a time to develop other leaders

#4: Age varies: if God so wills, a time when your leadership influence will extend beyond your community

Lots of good advice was given at each step on how to make the most of that step, but the best came at the end where Hybels talked about how the influence of a Christian leader, unlike that of a product that grows, peaks and declines, can grow until your dying day. He ended by the saying: "If you lead well, people will live. It is life or death. Step it up."

Application for leaders in their church communications:

Young and very excited leaders can motivate people sometimes by passion alone, but as Hybels talked about, when passion is no longer enough you need skills and infrastructure. I think a critical, if not the most critical part of a church infrastructure, if it is to grow and thrive, is the communication component.

A leader needs followers and it is hard to follow if you don't know where the leader is going. Clear communication, repeated often and in a form that can be easily accessed is vital for any leader. Many of you reading this work with strong leaders whose impact could be multiplied many times if you would help them clarify and communicate their message more effectively. In addition, many of you who are leaders need to more effectively use the technology skills of your followers to help share your message.

Not every leader has the computer/technology skills needed

Many of you reading this work with strong leaders whose impact could be multiplied many times if you would help them clarify and communicate their message more effectively. In addition, many of you who are leaders need to more effectively use the technology skills of your followers to help share your message.

We are put in a body for a reason. Often pastors and other Christian workers who have powerful person-to-person skills, great enthusiasm and fantastic up-front crowd motivating skills, are not good at nuts and bolts writing and communication. In addition, few up-front leaders are skilled at publication planning, layout and design. Finally, I know very few leaders who delight in crafting HTML for websites in their off hours. Yes, the younger the pastor the more computer skills he or she may possess, but there are quite a few mid-life pastors today who are still are not comfortable using a computer.

I speak from personal experience in this area because I am married to a bi-vocational pastor who is passionate about God, fantastic with people, and whose technology skills a few years ago ended with trying to remember to make sure the original was straight in the copy machine. In his late 40s he learned to type and how to use a computer. Answering his own email and researching Christian topics are the primary ways he uses it. Creating his own publications is not even something he considers and I imagine he isn't much different than many pastors.

When we are about to launch a big ministry initiative—I know the communication for it is my job. I will interview my husband and create a communication program for the ministry initiative. He knows what he wants to say; I can help put it into a series of bulletin announcements, postcards, flyers, brochures, website entries and the various other pieces that are needed.

We are fortunate because we have worked together long enough in ministry that he trusts me to create various pieces, to take his ideas and make them tangible. Many of you may not have that kind of a relationship, but you don't have to marry someone to get it.

We are in a family in the church of Jesus. In that family you may be a leader who needs help or a church or staff member who sees event after event fall short of its possible impact because of poor communication. Get together to help each other. We cannot assume, even in this age of technology, that everyone has the skills needed to do their own communication work. Ask for help if you need it; offer help if you have the skill to do so.

Not only a leader, but a congregation benefits

Not only is the life-cycle of a leader impacted by his or her communication skill, but so also is the lifecycle of a church or ministry. A leader will be limited, and

following that, the growth of the church, if the leader relies on personal interaction and communication to lead. Today, we need technology and good communication skills that go beyond one-on-one interaction.

When a church is just starting and everybody knows everybody, much communication is interpersonal and casual—but to fully fulfill the Great Commission, your church must grow and with it, the complexity of your communications. This is not optional; work on setting up good communication systems that are not dependant on a primary leader early on so that your growth in communications is not limited by your time and skills in communication technology.

Set up systems, help each other and work together, and as Hybels said, your growth in influence in your church can expand beyond your community and throughout your life.

Note on quotes:

The quotes in the article above were taken from my written notes while attending the conference and not guaranteed to be exact. However, as a former newspaper reporter, I attempt to take clear and accurate notes and have not repeated anything that was not clear to me or that does not represent the view of the speaker. For exact content, I strongly recommend the DVD of the conference, which contains the messages from all of the speakers. This can be obtained from: http://www.willowcreek.com/events/ leadership/resources.asp

One more note:

I personally, strongly recommend attending the Leadership Summits of the Willow Creek Association. They are simulcast at locations all over the   U. S. and Canada (all over the world actually). You will learn and be inspired to be both a better leader and communicator from your time attending See website listed above for more information.

Sugar water or sand? How to really change the world

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matt. 7:24-27)

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

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

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

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

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

Because of the communications you create, lonely people will feel welcome in church when they see the cheerful message and graphics in your bulletin; hungry folks will be fed because your brochure explained a food drive well; birthdays will be remembered and people will feel they count for something because you carefully entered the names into data bases and printed out calendars. And sometimes, whether in a brochure, or newsletter, or web page, you'll clearly communicate the message of the gospel and the destiny of another soul will be changed for eternity.

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

from *The Heart of Church Communications*, by Yvon Prehn, available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn

About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of the training site for church communicators, www.effectivechurchcom.com. This site has hundreds of articles, videos, podcasts, templates, samples and reviews that help churches intentionally create communications that will enable them to fully fulfill the Great Commission.

Yvon has worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a freelance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN* for nine years. She was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company when desktop publishing was first invented. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at both Compassion International and Young life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications to thousands of churches in every denomination. She continues teaching virtual seminars through her website, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

She has written for many of the major Christian magazines including *Christianity Today, Discipleship Journal, Today's Christian Woman, Youthworker Journal, Ministries Today, Computing Today, Clergy Journal, Church Office Computing, Pulpit Helps,* and *Your Church.* She has been the communication columnist for *Christian Computing Magazine* for over 16 years. Her most recent books include: *Church Bulletins, how to create and use them to touch and change lives, Church Connection Cards, connect with visitors, grow your church, pastor your people, little cards, big results, The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing,* and *The Heart of Church Communication*s. In addition to these books, she has a number of shorter booklets, how-tos, and publication samples, many available as downloads on her storefront at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn and on her training website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

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

In addition to her formal experience in these areas, Yvon gets the opportunity to practice church communications in very practical ways. She is the wife of a bi-vocational pastor and does the majority of the secretarial and church communications work for her husband Paul, in addition to co-teaching in a variety of ministry settings at the church they work with in Ventura, California.

Yvon's seminars and written material have helped thousands of people in ministry maximize their church communications and enabled them to use them to help fully fulfill the Great Commission.

**For free articles, tips and ideas, and to sign up for her free newsletter for church communicators, please go to:
www.effectivechurchcom.com**

**Follow Yvon Prehn on Twitter at:
www.twitter/yvonprehn**

End notes, Reprint Information, Resources, etc.

Permission to reproduce articles:

You may reproduce single copies of any of these articles for your church staff or you may reprint them in any publication or website that is intended to help churches without additional permission and with my blessings.

PLEASE use the following citation:
by Yvon Prehn, www.effectivechurchcom.com

I would appreciate you linking to my website and/or letting me know if you cite me, but if ministry life is just too crazy to take time to do that, instead, have a latte, relax, and forget it.

Interview info:

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

Additional resources, training and church communication instruction:

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

The website has both free materials, plus low-cost downloadable communication helps, and materials available to members only,

Effective Church Communications also has a church communication resources storefront at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn that sells downloadable and paperback books and instructional materials on CDs.

Citation note:

Some of these articles appeared in earlier versions in either articles in *Christian Computing Magazine*, my book, *The Heart of Church Communication*s, misc. books and reprints, or on my website, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

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.

Comments, corrections, questions, suggestions for additional articles or information to help church communications etc.

Please send to yvon@effectivechurchcom.com