

# Creating a Communications Plan



The manner in which we communicate, both internally and externally, is of vital importance to each of our ministry settings. Creating a communications plan can help organize and maintain how and why you communicate. While some congregations have a dedicated communications staff member, other congregations may only have an administrative staff member, a volunteer or team of volunteers, or the pastor themselves handling all communication. Sometimes things can get messy, confusing, overlooked, or stretched too thin. To this end, a communications plan is a great resource for reference and check-in, leading to more fluidity, intentionality, and sustainability in both day-to-day and overarching communications.

This guide is intended to help tackle the steps of creating a communications plan and then implementing and updating it.

## Identify your mission & goals

First steps first: what are the goals of your communications? Think about what you are trying to achieve, both internally and externally, when you communicate. How do your communications goals tie in with your mission or welcoming statement? Think about making your goals broad and expressive of values rather than specific actions that will eventually be completed.

For example, the synod's communications plan has three goals:

1. Promote the synod as a *resource* for congregations – more than just a resource for call processes and candidacy.
2. Create meaningful & fitting content for all communications channels. Get rid of any channel that is not effective or has no clear purpose.
3. Create communications about both our global church and domestic church so that they are seamlessly interconnected. Tell the stories of our churches, ministry settings, ministry partners, & global companions. Telling many stories creates an overlapping web of what it means to *be church, together*.

## Consider your audience

Who are you trying to reach? This might be different for external vs. internal communication. Keeping your audience in mind is the key to successful communications; it will help you determine both messaging and channels of communication.

## Identify channels of communication

What channels will you use to communicate so that you can both reach your intended audience and fulfill your missional goals? Some channels to consider include website, e-newsletters, printed newsletters &

other print materials, bulletin inserts, paid advertising, and Facebook or other social media. You might also consider how you will reach media outlets to aid in external communications.

Another useful approach is to make a list of and analyze the channels you *currently* utilize. What is the purpose of each different channel? Are they effective? What can you do to make them more effective? How are each different? What audience do you currently reach with each? What type of messaging do you use with each?

## **Implementation**

How will you implement your new plan? Consider some of the following questions: Who is responsible for updating & maintaining each channel? How often will you communicate and from what channel? How does messaging change across channels? What oversight will there be to make sure that messaging stays true to the plan? How will you track progress and/or success?

## **Create a plan**

State your mission and goals. Identify each channel that will be used, how use of the channel relates to your goals, what the intended audience for each is, and other necessary information, such as frequency of use, messaging/language, etc.

## **Other things to consider**

Who will be creating this plan? Assemble a “communications committee” of volunteers or staff to help.

What will you do if there is a crisis or emergency? Consider creating an action plan so that even in the face of an emergency or crisis, your messaging stays true to your plan and all proper channels are used.

Before creating your plan, do a survey asking congregational members what they would like to be reading or hearing about, and what channels they already use or would use.

How are you tracking success? Consider using programs like Google Analytics to track your website. Social media like Facebook automatically gives you feedback. Hootsuite is also a tool to help track clicks, follows, etc. across a number of social media channels. Use your email marketing software to track how your email messaging is doing and if your subscriber list is expanding.

Communications is an ever-changing world. Methods and channels change, and so should your communications plan. Regularly check-in with your plan and analyze what is working and what is not. Consider what new channels of communication are available to you and how they might fit into your plan.

Maintaining communications takes *time*. How much time do you or your staff member or volunteer have per week to allocate to keeping communications fresh and up-to-date? Don't stretch yourself too thin. The point of a communications plan is so that you can manage your communications more easily. If you feel like you are being stretched too thin, ask yourself what channels you can eliminate or use less of.