



The use of print in outreach

Rethinking your church's practice

A21 Articles series: Communication

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This article is designed to help churches reassess their use of printed literature for outreach. It is easy either to get stuck with particular items, whether bought or printed in-house, continuing with these year by year, or to fail to see the value of print in mission and do little.

Websites have become a vital means of such communication, but print still has an important role to play.

There are three parts. The first takes an overview of items of print designed for those who are not yet members of the Christian community and offers a possible structure for a review. Few churches undertake an exercise like this. Here are guidelines to help you do it well.

The second and third parts illustrate what may come out of such a review by taking two examples (distribution leaflets and welcome brochures/packs), offering down-to-earth advice and suggesting some fresh ways in which to approach them.

How to conduct a review

This is an exercise best undertaken by a group. It is set here in the context of all your church's printed literature. The advice is given in five stages.

1: Analyse each item of print

It is not a bad idea to take an overview of everything you print, whether for the congregation or others. There are probably more items than you had realised.

For each item, state the following (these might be the column headings for a table):

- title;
- some measure of size / number of pages;
- frequency (weekly, annually, etc.);
- print run and method of distribution;
- who is responsible for each stage in the writing and production processes.

That is the easy bit, but just a fraction dull.

So, secondly, here are some more important markers for each item. These all need thought:

- those at whom it is aimed;
- the impact you want it to have on these people;
- the implications for copy, design, production and distribution.

This is especially important for items you are printing for people who are not your regular congregation, because you will not know them as well as you know your members.

Try to be specific. Instead of saying that a leaflet is aimed “at everyone living within a mile of the church building”, try to define what one or two such people are like. Or aim to narrow it down in terms of age, interests, lifestyle, attitudes.

It is essential to define the impact you want each piece of print to have. If you cannot do this, don't bother to print it! It only has value if it is designed to change people in some way: by informing them, by challenging them, by intriguing them, or whatever.

Thirdly, something on assessment (which should first involve some research):

- where it is currently succeeding in reaching and impacting the intended readership;
- where it is currently failing in this and why;
- whether it needs to continue at all, or be changed in some way.

This may involve some market research: asking a few of your intended readers if they recognise your literature or if they remember receiving it, and asking what they did with it. Try not to duck this one: it may be painful but if your print is not doing what you want it to do, isn't it better to know that and change things?

If you can present all this information in an appropriate format, you now have some helpful data for several of the other actions in this article. You should also have had to do some hard thinking, and should now see some necessary action points. But don't act quite yet because the next thing to do is to ...

2: Assess *all* your print

Having made a list of individual items, you now need to make some overall sense of it. It may be helpful to sort it by intended readers. Here is a possible three-way grouping.

1 **Items for groups within the church**

Under this heading would come programme cards (for small groups, for young people's work and for various

activities), papers and minutes for councils and committees, rotas for various jobs that need to be done, and so on.

2 **Items for the whole church**

Notice and service sheets, newsletters and magazines, prayer diaries, church directory, church programme, annual reports and accounts, stewardship letters, and probably lots more.

3 **Items designed more for those outside the church**

This is what this article will focus on, so: posters, car stickers, brochure, welcome leaflet, publicity leaflets, a community magazine.

Now ask some hard questions. Take all the items for those outside the church (group 3).

- Between them, what effect are they having (from the research under stage 1)?
- Are they duplicating each other in any way?
- Are they supporting more personal forms of communication or are they excuses to enable the church to pretend it is doing all it can to reach outwards?
- How do they complement your website?
- What kind of image do they present of your church, and of the Christian faith?
- Are they written and presented in such a way that those with no church allegiance will actually want to read them?
- Are there areas and people you are not covering?
- What changes might be appropriate?

To answer these questions, it is no good asking church members for their assessment, and certainly not your church leaders. You must rely on the view of the intended readership, which is why research (see stage 1) is so important. A Christian's view of how well a leaflet is doing its job may be very wide of the mark unless there is tangible evidence (such as new people coming to a church service or joining an Alpha-type group).

In all cases, it is likely that action is triggered by a personal approach, but the printed literature may well be providing an essential backdrop to this. So go outside and find some assessors.

Perhaps the time has come to bring some items to an end. Are you producing something just because that's what you do? Is your measure of success simply getting it out? Are you wasting resources by printing material that has little impact?

3: Think 'their need' not 'our want'

Having got this far, now try a different exercise which goes in the opposite direction!

The standard approach is to start with a printed item (a community magazine, say) and consider what to do with it or how to improve it. There is nothing wrong with that as such and it is what I have been doing in effect in stages 1 and 2 above. My suggestion here is to start, instead, with a genuine people 'need' and work from that to 'print'.

So, you might say that people who your congregation network with need to know the Good News of Jesus Christ. Without it they are impoverished.

So do they need an explanation of the Gospel? At some stage, yes. But that is not what most people are looking for. They have no idea of this need at all so you have to start somewhere else. How about showing them the difference that this Gospel makes to someone's life, someone they know? So you are now into ideas of people and relationship.

How does print fit into this? Here are two possibilities: first it can be helpful as a hand-out that a Christian gives to someone they have got to know. Secondly, the print itself might need to be centred on people-stories rather than an explanation of the Gospel or a listing of events.

So the idea of someone telling their story (preferably in words that the Plain English Campaign would approve of – which is not how many Christian stories are written) becomes an essential aspect of anything you print. Do not give in to those who demand a gospel message within each story. Limit your aim, perhaps to showing the church to be an attractive family to be part of (if it is!). The rest can follow later.

And the print has got to look good if it is to be read at all. That means that photographs become an essential part of the design. Which may mean a more professional approach than you are used to, with very short paragraphs and excellent design.

Can you see that this approach may lead to all kinds of new ideas, rather than the normal approach of starting with an existing product and trying to improve it? It may be that this product is wrong in the first place. Or that the content needs a complete rethink. Here is one example.

- 1 Take those living in the village, most of whom rarely attend church services but many of whom would regard this church as 'theirs' in some way.
- 2 What are the main messages you want to get through to them, the attitudes you want to change and the actions you want them to take as a result?

- 3 What are the means available to you for how to get these messages across, with the emphasis on personal communication?
- 4 What part can print and other media play to support these? In what form? At what frequency?
- 5 What are the implications for the kind of words, the design, and the distribution?

4: Question means and distribution

Where printed literature may once have been almost the only means of mass communication, there is now a range of other possibilities.

For example, if you want to reach those who are not part of the worshipping life of your church, you have: human networks above everything else but also website, email, texting, social networking sites, blogs, the local media, advertisements, notice-boards, publicity banners, home-made DVDs, car stickers, and so on.

But what are the points in favour and against each of these when compared with traditional print? Some reach only a small people-group, some carry conviction but lack detail, some depend on the receiver first offering to be circulated in this way.

Much depends too on how available some of the modern means of communication are. A text message system is not going to help those who do not have mobiles, and the website will cut no ice with those without computers or those who rarely use them in this way.

It is an important principle of communication to use a variety of means available to get one message through to a wide range of people. Print on paper will no doubt be with us for some time to come yet.

So, for each printed item for outreach: is print an appropriate medium to use, the only means, or the best?

But while questioning print as a medium, ask hard questions too about the means of distribution.

For example, personal invitations are much more powerful than leaflet drops, but many churches still assume that the only way to tell people living in the area about special events or services is to do a letterbox distribution. They simply assume they do not have the people-power to knock on each door – when they have tried this, it falls to the same few volunteers.

But not so if you follow the example of one church and, for example, cancel your church service one Sunday in early December. Everyone

arrives for 15 minutes of praise and prayer, dressed up for the great outdoors, then people collect leaflets for each street or road and set out to knock on every door within the next hour. Not everyone is in (or awake!), but half may be and they receive a personal invitation. Then back to church for mince pies and coffee and stories of doorstep conversations. Those who find it difficult to walk distances stay at church to pray.

5: Put someone in charge

By now it may be apparent that to have someone responsible may be a Good Idea. But if thinking in stages, this should of course come first.

It may not be a traditional role in the Church, but the idea of appointing a Communications Supremo (under a suitable job title) is worth serious thought. This needs to cover every means of communication, not just print or there will be no incentive to consider choice of media.

Such a person would oversee both internal and external communication, without necessarily being directly responsible for any one item within this range (in fact, far better not to be

responsible for one item or otherwise they will favour that over others).

For internal use, the idea would be to get the right messages flowing throughout the church to the right people. Note that no one needs to know everything (although those craving power will always claim they need to know everything that is going on). The Supremo would check every case of miscommunication or non-communication and seek to ensure that this did not happen again.

For external use, there might need to be some sort of ongoing assessment of how the local community perceived the church to see what kind of messages were getting through. Remember that members of the congregation parking across people's driveways in local streets, or a badly maintained churchyard, may give much more powerful messages (of the wrong sort) than a printed invitation to a special service. Communication comes in many forms.

Within the field of print, it can also be helpful to have someone with appropriate gifts who has oversight of design for all church publications (aiming for a common visual style), and an overall editor with a concern for writing style across the whole range. Then you can improve standards.

Example 1 – an outreach leaflet

For my first example, I have chosen an outreach leaflet because most churches either overlook this means of promotion and aid to evangelism or waste their money by failing to use it well. Putting it bluntly, most churches that do anything at all are stuck in a rut. So here I analyse the various ruts that you may be in.

The rut of purpose

The default setting is to provide news of church services at Christmas, Easter and, possibly, Harvest. That is good when local people are interested in joining you on these occasions but, except in rural areas, this group is becoming tiny. In most areas the Church is on the margin of society, no longer at the centre of it. A better means might be the offer of an email or a postal reminder service for those who sign up for this – does anyone do this?

So reassess your purpose. Are you rightly trying to invite people to services, or would there be a better aim such as to:

- create an image of your church that means people start to take you seriously and will respond when they meet your members;

- invite them to something more appropriate (see below);
- show them that the Christian faith is relevant to people today and worthy of consideration;
- welcome newcomers to the area?

Be imaginative! Here are some ideas of non-festival events which give a reason for a leaflet with a purpose such as those above.

- **Back to Church Sunday**
This was launched 2004 and is already an international and interdenominational phenomenon. Here is an intriguing national 'excuse' to distribute a promotional leaflet about your church. The day is specifically targeted at the 40% of the population who are 'dechurched' (with

church connections in their background). It usually falls near the end of September.

- **A local connection or special event**
Ideas include a local carnival weekend, a holiday club, a special taster-Sunday for your church, a fun day you lay on for the local community, meet the new Minister, a DVD evening on parenting, a flower festival, a special guest speaker, a debt counselling service.
- **A way-in course**
If your church runs Alpha-type courses, you may want to put round a special leaflet advertising each one. This, like some of the other means in this list, may not result in people joining the course because that almost always depends on personal invitation, but can still have value.
- **A particular group**
Encourage your small groups, clusters or missional communities to promote themselves in their area (if these are organised on a geographical basis). Persuade your young people's work to put something out promoting their activities and groups.

Remember, the event may only be the hook you use to give a reason for a leaflet. What matters is the real purpose you have in mind.

Some churches have a heritage leaflet about their church building. Even this can be used with some imagination. A few years ago I worked with a church at a major tourist site. They had a leaflet all about the history but they failed to mention that the building was now home to a thriving and growing congregation. Once I had pointed this out, they changed their leaflet to one focusing on people-stories of today, not just those of a few centuries earlier!

One real purpose may be simply to say, "We are a group of ordinary people who belong to something very special – do you realise what you are missing?". If this message is reinforced time and again in a variety of ways with plenty of human interest stories, an image starts to form in people's minds. Then when a friend says they belong to your church or invites them to an event.....

The rut of design and content

Design

Basic principle: literature going outside the church membership has got to look good. That usually means professional full colour printing. The standard layouts are A5 sheet or card, or

A4 glossy paper folded into three (the norm for tourist leaflets).

Typical design features to catch people's attention: one simple message to get across, large and bold headlines, visual symbols such as the church logo to give identity, very short paragraphs (one or two sentences each), plenty of colour photographs of people, any design features appropriate for the target readership.

A rural or urban estate church distributing round an identified community may get away with something home printed provided it still looks good. Where there is little sense of community focused on the church, invest your money and make it look professional.

You can use pre-printed stationery that you overprint but quality colour print of your own making is now within a reasonable budget for many churches. Having said that, something too posh may be a turn-off too in some communities, so consider what might be appropriate for your area.

Content

It is vital to hold to the standard rules of print which include knowing:

- what you want to say (express it to yourself in one sentence);
- exactly who you are writing for;
- what action you want them to take next.

Otherwise you simply fill the space with words – that is not communication.

Most churches find it incredibly difficult to write for people who have no living faith in Jesus Christ. They pepper their leaflets with Christian jargon which comes across as gobbledegook to most people (such as names you use for your church services, words such as 'worship' and 'fellowship', theological terms as simple as 'sin' and 'cross'). They use far too many words in the first place (think bullet point notes, not prose). Church leaders assume that what interests them is what everyone out there wants to hear about.

Content needs to be more geared to stories of real people who find that belonging to your church is a positive experience. The best leaflets I see have one or two sentence quotes from people of differing ages (with their photographs) who come across as surprisingly normal!

Here is what I have in mind (from a leaflet some years ago): "When we first came to Christ Church we were made welcome as part of the church family. Its friendly atmosphere embraces young, old, rich, poor alike. Great coffee afterwards!"

If advertising events or services, people need to know not just the time but issues such as no

dress code, loos on site, how to get there, parking, childcare, and what to expect. For many people, to come to something at your church may be a terrifying experience: you have got to help them.

Don't forget key information: church name, website details, telephone number, map.

Surprise

One leaflet in my possession promotes an Alpha-type course (on bright colour imaged background): "Church is boring!" it starts, "It's just not relevant... It is so old fashioned! Why is there so much suffering? Christianity is just a crutch." Over the page it states, "You're right!" (I won't give the game away by saying how it goes on!)

Another glossy leaflet is headed "Now that's living! The ultimate healthclub! Free lifetime membership, join today!" The copy inside talks briefly about a healthy spiritual life as well as a healthy body, with short pieces from three members.

You have a second or two to grab people's attention as they glance at your leaflet. If nothing in the design or headline or pictures catches their eye in that time, your leaflet is in the bin and your money is wasted. Never mind how brilliantly pithy is the copy that follows, it's that first look that counts.

For a slightly different angle, see Training Notes TN39, *We've got news for you!*, in the Resources section of this website.

The rut of distribution

The default means of leaflet distribution is to get the usual volunteers to drop them into every home in the area. But are you sure this is proving to be effective? What research do you carry out to see how many of these leaflets are read and acted on? If you don't carry out research (see review stage 1), how do you know whether to continue this activity or not?

Take the idea of a general promotional leaflet (which may include some service details either on an ongoing basis or for a special season such as Christmas). Here are some other distribution ideas, some of which might be more effective and less wasteful of paper.

- **Tourist leaflet racks**

Examples include the local Tourist Information Centre, local hotels and restaurants, libraries, local tourist attractions, some shops, etc. You don't have to be in a specifically holiday area for

this to work. The leaflet does not have to focus on 'heritage' issues – some visitors simply want to know what is available.

- **Local service providers**

I don't mean church services! It is worth asking local estate agencies if they would be interested in carrying a rack of your leaflets, especially if they are aimed at people new to the area. If the print looks professional, some may be happy to do this. Again, doctors' surgeries and health centres may be prepared to stock copies, especially if geared to groups such as parents and toddlers. Church schools should have leaflets on display for parents. And so on.

- **In your church building**

If you have visitors to your church building each week, try to ensure they take home a leaflet not just about the fabric but about the living church that has its home in the building. As with all these ideas the leaflet needs to look good and people's eyes need to be drawn to it. The leaflet should of course also be given to newcomers who come to a service, or included within a more detailed welcome pack (see the next and final part of this article).

- **Ongoing visiting programmes**

The last idea gave the possibility of personal distribution (by a church member at a service, or by a 'church watcher' at a building open during the week). Better still to hand the leaflet over and explain it during an organised visit: some churches have a team that seek to visit the whole area street by street over two or three years. Other churches may have baptism or bereavement teams. Some Ministers still have a door-to-door programme they follow.

- **One-off visiting programmes**

Dropping 2,000 leaflets through 2,000 letterboxes is certainly not evangelism! There is no human contact whatsoever. The exercise may simply be an excuse for a church to think they have done something brave in 'going out'.

But seeking to speak to 2,000 people on their doorsteps in one day may give opportunities for evangelism. Why not follow the example of the church described earlier (pages 3 and 4) that went out together to every door in their area?

Some churches might consider distributing a leaflet with the local free newspaper, but this is expensive and the benefits questionable.

The rut of disconnection

I despair at the way some churches pour hundreds of pounds into a good leaflet, even one following all the advice above, but see no link to everything else they are seeking to be and do. Here are some examples of disconnected thinking to avoid.

- **The one-off leaflet**
Literature of the kind described here creates an image over time, from its content, its look and its distribution (the personal contact). One leaflet on its own cannot do this. For some people it will only be when the fifth leaflet arrives that they begin to recognise the look and start to read. So have an outreach print strategy over time, not a one-off effort that enables you to tick the 'Been there, done that' box.
- **No link to other print**
Your outreach print strategy needs to be broader than just these leaflets. Your website should play a significant part, not to mention other means such as posters and car stickers (see review stage 2). If they all build on one visual image (through logo, design features, etc.) they work together. You might like to link too to a site such as www.rejesus.co.uk.
- **No human contact**
Print should always be a support for personal contact, never an excuse for it.

It is a useful way of broadcasting news to a reasonably large number of people. But it needs personal relationship with the living church to make it work.

- **A false image**
Just say your Christmas leaflet leads to ten people arriving for one of your services on Christmas Day. What happens next? Do they find that the glowing way the leaflet described your church services is true? Was the reader-friendly language mirrored in the newcomer-friendly approach of the service? If not, you have created not a neutral but a negative message.
 - **Lack of joined-up thinking**
Staying with the Christmas visitors, did your congregation welcome them, get to know them as appropriate, invite them home, develop a real relationship? Or was your only aim to get them through your door only to go home again? Where is the joined-up thinking there?

Or you promote a children's holiday club and 100 come. How do you link up with the parents afterwards? Or was your only aim to get kids to the club? That leaflet might waste much time and money if not part of a coherent plan for being a mission-centred church.
- So test your leaflet on my four ruts. How do you score? What will you do?

Example 2 – a welcome leaflet/folder

If outreach leaflets are one of the first points of contact with people, welcome literature relates to a later stage in a natural process.

There is no way to communicate 'Welcome!' as well in print as you can in person. After all, you don't let a leaflet pop out of a dispenser at your front door when an expected visitor rings the bell.

But if welcome is an important element of your church's strategy for growth, print can play a valuable support role. Consider a visitor coming to any event at your church (not just a Sunday service). A printed leaflet or a folder or pack:

- gives the visitor a take-away to study;
- may get put on their kitchen notice-board or, if a folder, left on a coffee table;
- provides a useful conversation-starter as a welcomer hands it over;
- demonstrates that the church expects newcomers and takes them seriously;
- provides a message about the church through its quality (or lack of) and content;
- can include a response slip of some kind.

So this is something that might well come up as part of your outreach print requirements as you undertake the kind of analysis described in the first part of this article. Here is how the theory

might work out in practice in different possible forms, with some warnings of all-too-common mistakes to avoid, and suggestions for how to get started.

Shapes and sizes

Welcome literature can be as simple as a postcard or as detailed as a booklet or a classy folder. Here are some examples to give an idea of what is possible. This assumes that there is already a welcome expressed in the notice-sheet and on any PowerPoint display. And of course that the literature is only supporting a genuine personal welcome given by church members.

Simple card/sheet *(may be on chairs/pews)*

Many of these include, or are, a form to be completed and handed in. So:

- post-card or similar, possibly with freepost address;
- coated card, one-third A4 or folded A5;
- A4 sheet of paper, folded to A5 or A6.

Leaflet

This would be like most tourist information leaflets (see Example 1 above), so:

- A4 coated sheet folded to one-third size printed in colour often with photographs;
- simpler matt, coloured card printed in black;
- A3 coated sheet folded down to A5.

Pack

A card or plastic cover with different sheets inside – usually A5:

- printed card folder in colour from external supplier with leaflets inside;
- plain plastic cover holding sheets cut to different sizes and in different colours;
- standard office A4 folder holding welcome literature, sample magazine and local items.

Booklet/brochure/folder

For larger churches with a reasonable budget:

- 8-12 page colour brochure on coated paper with many photographs;
- ditto printed in one/two colours on white matt paper;

- 16+ page booklet in full colour with reply card stapled inside;
- card folder with loose sheets inside.

Simpler cards or leaflets may be placed on chairs and in pews. Packs and booklets may be available from a welcome desk, racks on display boards and by hand from a welcomer.

Content

At the simpler end of the scale, content may include some/all of:

- short expression of welcome;
- purpose statement in some form;
- explanation about service, refreshments, children;
- main events, Sunday and weekday;
- any Alpha-type courses;
- contact details including Minister and website;
- form to complete for further information or personal visit.

For leaflets in the centre of the range, add in also (in addition to more photographs/visuals):

- historical perspective if relevant;
- baptisms, weddings, etc.;
- staff / those responsible for key areas (eg. children, youth, bereavement);
- short jargon-free commendations from members of the congregation (with photos);
- current teaching series;
- some idea of small groups and other regular activities.

The more complex the pack or brochure, the closer it becomes to a website content (for a checklist here, try Article A14 in the Resources section of this website). Much will simply be the above ideas in greater detail but consider also:

- introduction from Minister;
- explanation for newcomers;
- who's who (list of all leaders);
- church beliefs / priorities / vision / values;
- fuller details of activities for all ages;
- pastoral care and outreach information;
- global mission interests;
- details of all church sites with maps.

But you may also include details for people moving into the area:

- other churches (if you are generous!);
- local map;
- details of doctors, dentists, public transport, etc.;
- useful telephone numbers: local authority, etc.

Some include financial information (but see dangers of this below):

- message from Treasurer;
- budget/simple accounts;
- envelope scheme and Gift Aid details;
- standing order form and/or credit/debit card form.

It will all depend on who you are aiming it at (back to the review in the first part of this article again). In all these cases don't do too much on activities. Focus instead on who you are, why you are here, and where you are going.

Not so welcoming...

But some attempts at welcome literature give quite the opposite impression from the one intended. On the basis that explaining 'how not to' can be a powerful way of providing correct ideas, here are six (rather common) examples to avoid. Which one or more is your church prone to?

We give you a truly tatty welcome!

No, of course *you* wouldn't say that to anyone. But *your card or leaflet* might say it powerfully. If you don't have many visitors to your events and your welcomers hold a pile of leaflets in their hands each week, or they are left on a table in a cold, damp church building, you may find that they quickly lose that sparkingly brand-new look. Examples:

- corners frayed;
- cards curling;
- scribbles on the back;
- paper yellowed or stained;
- ink-jet print smudged.

Or it may just be that you present a second-rate image by a cheaply photocopied card in an area where people are used to quality productions in full colour. Or that you never proofed the material and those typos really show it up as second-rate.

So: use leaflet racks, replace second-rate stock immediately, laminate your cards, use better quality paper/card, keep a smaller stock on

display, proof everything thoroughly, and ask visitors what impression they received.

We'd love to intrude on your private life!

This occurs when there is a form to be completed. For a start, many visitors may not have something to write with and any form can look threatening.

Some requests for information may be unnecessary: do you need title, full first names, mobile number, signature (all on samples in front of me as I write this)? For some people you may at some stage need this, but an initial welcome is not the place to be intrusive.

Think what some of these requests say to certain people: "Title (Mr/Dr/Revd/Mrs/Miss)" provides powerful messages to certain visitors (work it out). "Please give ages of all your children" might be painful for some if expressed in this way. These have been written from the viewpoint of what the church would like to know, rather than from what the visitor might be happy to provide. And you call it hospitality?

So keep it ever so simple: Name / Address / Telephone / Email / perhaps a list of what the person is interested in to tick and then, in small print, some assurance as to how you will and will not use this information.

What we're really after is your money!

It is surprising how many welcome packs include messages from the Treasurer with details of envelope schemes, standing orders and Gift Aid. Someone who has decided to join your church will need that information (though it might be better handed over in person), but is that the message you want to give to a casual visitor?

So omit the financial appeals – though by all means include a sentence or two about how the church is financed ("we don't expect visitors to contribute"). You could also include some idea of how those who want to make this their home can get a financial pack.

Don't you dare sit in my pew!

Nothing cancels out a really good leaflet better than the cold shoulder from the person sitting next to the visitor (or asking them to move!). All your effort to get the wording right in print may be shown to be a sham if your congregation ignore the unknown visitors or make a mess of the way they speak to them ("I've not seen you before"). What does it say if your leaflet has photographs of lively, smiling people but your congregation look as though they have come to a funeral? Print has to be the support, not the main act.

So if you are buying into print, invest in training for the congregation too. But it is more than that. If your congregation is Christ-centred in their thinking and mission-focused in their attitude, they will be ready to welcome the stranger (even if they still need training in how to do it well). If they see themselves as members of an exclusive club, no amount of training will do much good.

If you cannot damage your welcoming impression in this way, all is not lost. You can still forget to follow up the returned card, fail to remember names the next time the person visits, or focus exclusively on people who come for the first time!

Welcome to how we were last year!

You can give this impression, again by the quality of print (something suitable some years ago may look cheap today) but also by the information you provide. If you print leaflets to last some time beware changes: new staff, different activities, changed contacts, a fresh theme for the year. Consider the damage you can do this way.

Watch your format. If you print 1,000 copies of a colour booklet at some cost, you don't want to be recycling 950 copies after three months when the information becomes dated.

Check your details are up-to-date and have someone responsible for this. If you have a pack, replace the sheets that go out-of-date the moment they do. If something more fixed, decide when it is worth discarding dated stock and reprinting.

We're a pretty academic bunch here!

A quick look at literature I've picked up in churches shows paragraphs that last for several lines, complicated sentence construction, print that fills most of the paper, terminology that no normal person will comprehend, and a general lack of anything to break it all up such as sub-headings and, of course, photographs.

Good welcome literature uses relatively few words, plenty of photographs of people, more spaces than you think are necessary and a people-story style that is both easy and attractive to read. For more detail on how to write 'news' see Training Notes TN39, *We've got news for you!*, on this website.

Ideas to follow

So, how do you start? With passion!

If this is one person's brainchild without general support, forget it. Focus instead on teaching the

congregation on what it means to be a church that is turned outside in and downside up.

Welcome in print can only be a back-up to the personal openness of becoming a 'Church for the non-member' – which means on their terms, not yours. Get the congregation excited by the gospel of Jesus Christ first of all – and a true picture of what a church should be.

Secondly, get some training. For even with the right attitude, there are some basic skills to be learned. You might even ask me to run a fun-evening for you to do just this.

Thirdly, don't be too ambitious. Here are three basic ideas you might like to consider. But, at the same time, start collecting examples from other churches: some may prove to be examples to avoid, but others will provide you with ideas.

The laminated card

This is very easy to make and cheap to prepare, but looks professional. You need: someone who knows something about print design and how to put computer clip-art onto a page in an imaginative way, any basic colour printer (ink-jet is fine), and a simple laminating machine (someone may be able to do this at work if your church does not have one).

- 1 Decide what you want to say that will fit onto two-sides of a one-third section of A4 without looking crowded. A three-sentence welcome message from the Minister perhaps; something about who you are and what you believe; main activities; information that visitors would value: children, crèche, parking, (lack of) dress code; and a couple of jargon-less commendations from members of the congregation.
- 2 Type the two sides in two columns on one side of A4, with large and identical margins left and right and a large gap between the columns.
- 3 Add in appropriate photographs and some good clip-art and rules/tinted boxes in a way that is colourful, with some imaginative design. Use black as your main font colour.
- 4 Print as few or as many copies as you need, backing the sheet with itself, preferably on at least 100 gsm white paper for ink-jets so the print does not show through to the other side.
- 5 Laminate the whole sheet, then trim down to give two one-third A4 leaflets.

The professional leaflet

For a more adventurous approach, go for an A4 glossy leaflet, professionally printed and folded into three. This is the staple design for a publicity leaflet and local printers, or a specialist Christian printer who does this kind of thing, can help you get it right. There is more scope for content here (check out lists on page 8) but focus on what I suggest for the laminated card as a starting point. If there is someone in your congregation who has some idea of print design, that will help get it right.

The simple pack

Buy in a standard colour cover from an organisation such as Christian Publicity Organisation (www.cpo-online.org.uk and click on Welcome). Then you can put four or five A5 sheets inside to cover different areas of your work. Photocopied sheets will be sufficient – the cover provides the professional look. Some cut the leaflets to different sizes and print on

different coloured papers to give a rainbow effect as you open the pack.

Many churches will want to go further than these three examples, but these are provided for starters.

A final thought

In my post on the day I wrote the first draft of this article I received a parish profile from a very 'ordinary' church looking for a new Minister. As is typical of such profiles, it had been put together with care, was full of colour photographs, and gave an impression of professionalism.

So why is it that many churches are prepared to produce quality print in the hope of welcoming a new Minister, when they don't think it worth the trouble to produce something simpler but equally good when welcoming visitors?

So, there are two examples looked at in two different ways. You might like to try a similar exercise for the print you produce, or now see that you need to prepare as part of an outreach print strategy.

This article is available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/articles/a21.pdf. See also Articles A2, *Watch your image* and A14, *Create a quality website*. Also Training Notes TN2, *Ten steps to help you communicate*, TN22, *Appoint a church photographer!* and TN39, *We've got news for you!* For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of a review of your printed output, or a training event on welcoming newcomers to services.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A21 under Communication.

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