



We've got news for us!

TN38 Training Notes series: Communication

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Each week your church has news to broadcast. If it's news for the local community or the whole wide world, you use a press release and a website. If it's news for your own membership (the subject of these notes), you need some form of print or display, or you give out an announcement.

But most of us fail to make good use of these media. We use the wrong words, in an inappropriate style. Consider the following two examples.

- 1 The Church Council met five weeks ago and you want the congregation to know what happened. So, when they become available, you place a copy of the minutes on a notice-board. Job done, you think.

But this is a disaster! First, you are five weeks too late. Secondly, minutes are not designed as a means of telling a wider group what has happened: they are an official record for the group itself of the business tackled and the decisions taken. Thirdly, notice-boards are places to put things that no one will read.

- 2 Jason and Jackie had their first baby on Wednesday. They named him Jonah. So it goes down on the printed notice-sheet between the Bowls Club Reunion reminder and the weekly plea for more people to join the coffee rota.

But can't you do better than this? Is that the only level of excitement you can raise yourselves to for this great news? The church has just grown by one and it goes down as a printed footnote!

So how might you go about a new approach? Here are some ideas to consider, and then two suggestions for how the church council meeting might be reported. Your assignment is then to work out what you might do for Jonah and his parents.

Get into NEWS-mode

1 Think NEWS

The first point is simply one of attitude. Forget about those words that have been around in your church or mission for years (such as 'notices', 'announcements', or even 'intimations'!) and start thinking NEWS. It's a simple word; it's a powerful word; it's a word people are used to. We're going to communicate NEWS.

2 Learn NEWS

For print, get hold of any local newspaper and see how to do it. Each news item is the telling of a story. Look at how the whole story is summarised in the first sentence. Count how many sentences there are per paragraph (you may be surprised). Note the difference in size between the heading and the text. Watch out for sub-headings and quotes. See what information is given about the people involved. Examine the pictures that go with the stories.

For speech, watch TV News with a critical eye. Note the use of presenters standing and sitting, and the different camera angles. Time the longest period on any one shot before it changes. Watch the variety of approaches. Examine the use of interview and the techniques for doing it well.

3 Understand NEWS

To be the kind of news that people want to read or hear, check out these points. The story needs to be:

- people-centred (all about real people, or given a people-angle if it is not);
- visual (with people-pictures);
- colourful (including interesting details or unusual aspects);
- topical (bang up-to-date – with a hot-off-the-press feel to it);
- relevant (to those who are reading or listening to it).

Learn how to tell STORIES

- News needs a headline summarising the story and creating interest, then the filling in of the detail with the most important points first ending, in speech, with a recap.
- Print stories need a style of writing that gives the right mood. This can be created by careful choices of adjectives. In-house publications can include some humour.
- They also need to be in an appropriate place on the sheet, with their big, bold headings. Be aware that, in booklet format, the eye goes naturally to the odd-numbered pages in news-print design.
- Spoken stories need the right emotion added in to the telling. Reading woodenly from a script can kill the most exciting news item.
- They also need to be given out at the appropriate point in the service or event (this might be the very start, the time for intercessions, or in a regular 'Family News' slot).
- Make sure you know who the story is for: what these people will know already and what will interest them.
- Back it up with visuals wherever possible.

Introduce regular FEATURES

Church services might have a 'Family News' slot somewhere within them, so that the church together can rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. You are probably used to the idea of praying for those who are sick, but why not details of:

- hospital movements that week;
- births, marriages, deaths within people's wider families;
- exam successes, work promotions, and so on;
- news from a different small group or church activity each week;
- local community information.

This is a different idea from traditional notices (which tend to be about events or vacancies). To see this worked out as a church family newsletter, read Article A9 on this website.

Examples

Let's go back to our church council meeting at the start and rethink this one. First, this is what a formal *minute* of the main item might look like.

SUNDAY GROUP FOR 11-14s

The meeting discussed the problems being experienced by the present 11-14s group: the room in the hall was far too small as the group had grown, and numbers were too large for two leaders to work with effectively. After a long discussion, Rachel proposed that a second group be formed provided two new helpers could be found, and up to £500 be taken from the contingency fund to refurbish and equip the first floor storage room so the second group could meet there. An amendment to cut this back to £250 was defeated. Voting on the main motion was 11 in favour, 2 against. Rick agreed to action this with the leaders of the group.

That is fine as a *minute* designed for the council, but it is not a news story for the church. Here is what a *news report* might look like in next Sunday's hand-out sheet. Same story – different approach.

!BUZZ!* TO LAUNCH SECOND GROUP** ***Numbers double over past two years

From September, Christ Church will have not one but two *!BUZZ!* groups for younger teens. The Church Council took this bold decision at their meeting last Tuesday.

The second group will meet in a state-of-the-art (well, almost!), refurbished room on the first floor of the hall.

"This is fantastic news," explained Michelle who leads the present group. "We've already got new leaders and helpers lined up. This is just what we were hoping for! Now we can aim to grow further."

!BUZZ! has grown from 8 to 17 members over the past two years, with the members inviting their friends from school.

Spot the differences, and try this idea on something from your last church council (or equivalent) meeting. Note that the news report would only take one or perhaps two items from the meeting. You don't need to bother with this approach for 'Apologies for absence' or something like that!

But you might want to include something spoken in this Sunday's service (instead of the printed report, or in addition to it). Here is how an **interview** in a church 'Family News' slot might go.

Interviewer

Michelle, you've got some exciting news for us I understand.

Michelle

Yes, we're launching a second **!BUZZ!** group in September so that we can properly cope with the growing numbers.

Interviewer

That's great. But where will it meet?

Michelle

The Church Council are allowing us to use an old storage room in the hall and have agreed to fund its refurbishment. The group are keen to do the painting ourselves once the place has been cleared, and new cupboards and equipment installed.

Interviewer

Let me turn now to Mike who chairs the Finance Team. Mike, the Council don't spend money easily. What made you back this one?

Mike

No, we are careful with our limited funds, but we felt this was a great opportunity to support part of our church's life that is really moving ahead. Here was an opportunity we could not ignore. This is money well spent on a strategic initiative.

Interviewer

Thank you, Michelle and Mike. *(To everyone)* Do please pray for **!BUZZ!** members and leaders in this new development. Perhaps we shall need a third group next year!

For more ideas on how to do interviews in church, read Training Notes TN16 on this website. Now have a go yourself at the Jason and Jackie story at the start of these notes. What might you do with that one?

Too see how the concept of NEWS can be applied to communication to those outside your church, now read TN39, **We've got news for you!**

These notes are available on John's website at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn38.pdf. See also TN16, *Interviews in church services*, TN22, *Appoint a church photographer*, and A14 *Create a quality website*. For the same ideas applied to external communication see 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 training event on communicating church news, either within or outside your church's membership.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow and cover the six categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN38 under Communication.

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