



Outline of Workshop on Digital Communications in Parish Ministry
Thursday, May 6th 10 am
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Good communication practices are at the root of good ministry

From the pulpit, to the bulletin, to the coffee hour, to the bake sale to our digital messaging. Strategic, purposeful and well curated messages are the key to parish ministry. And you are all at the heart of this ...

The Digital Revolution has been underway for years now, compounded by the Global Pandemic so although the church as an institution can be deemed resistant to change, as you know, we have all been forced to act quickly and become more agile.

The world has changed radically, our brains have changed - the way we learn has changed - the way we teach and receive information has changed yet in many respects, the church hasn't. There is still much work to be done as we continue to adapt to the digital age but we are here now and are optimistic about the ways we, as parish communicators, can affect this change.

At this juncture, Without good, strategic communication practices we can't evangelize: we can't worship, we can't connect, in short... we can't be "the Church" (as we knew it)

As Church communicators, you are called to share the good news with our communities. This is no small feat!

In fact, we know that church attendance is decentralizing not decreasing - that means your job is having more impact than ever because your reach is further than the limitations of the four walls of your church buildings. It's a unique and exciting time for you all in particular.

As parish communicators, your role is critical and however varied your responsibilities are, you are the liaison between the clergy and the congregation, largely responsible for bulletins, emails, perhaps phone calls, organizing rental space (when that was a thing)....

Your list of tasks is endless! But here, we are going to focus on **Digital Communication**.

I hope to address the following questions ...

What is it?

When is it happening?

How can we improve?

Two Major Objectives for Successful Communications

1. Accuracy / Clarity

Be sure that your messages answer all the basic questions (who, what, why, when, where,) in as concise a manner as possible. Who/ what/ where/ when/ how and why.

2. Creativity / Relationship

Be sure that you are inviting your audience into a relationship with you by inspiring, being vulnerable, asking leading questions, sharing quotes, strategic photos and videos that are as relevant to your community as possible.

As parish communicators, we know that you are highly organized. Many people rely on you for information. Today, we hope to improve the way you see your role and inspire you to take it to the next level!

Start by asking important questions of identity about your church community.

Who are you? What do you love? What are you passionate about? What scares you? What makes you feel close to God? How can you address/ reflect this with your communication practices?

What are Digital Communications?

- Email
- Websites
- Social platforms

Digital Communications *Do's and Don'ts* for Parish Communicators

1. **Do:** Be willing to **take risks** and try something new. It's important to surprise your audience as our eyes stop seeing images and words once they become too familiar. We live in a digital era and we are bombarded with images. So we need to do our best to capture the hearts and imaginations of our audiences...

Don't: Do the same thing that everyone else is doing. Always remember the uniqueness of your church community.

2. **Do:** Take some time to visit the work of other parish communicators for inspiration (bulletins, emails, social pages, websites etc) notice what inspires you, what is clear and aesthetically pleasing and consider experimenting (notice their use of logos, photos, graphics, fonts, colours) **Remember: Aesthetics and visuals matter** - leverage every opportunity to deliver aesthetically pleasing emails, social posts, website content etc...

Don't: Fall into the trap of trying to be something or someone you are not. Tap into the essence of who your community is

3. **Do: Be Diligent! consistent, varied and impactful** (social pages, websites, email and bulletins) (use liturgical seasons to inspire you), banner images on websites and social pages are an excellent and easy tool to communicate seasons let your audience know that your pages are being monitored and are up to date. Pin posts on FB

Don't: neglect any of your platforms - your audience can make a snap decision to disregard you if your information is out of date / don't host too many pages otherwise you risk neglecting details on platforms.

4. **Do: Repurpose your content** to maximize your efforts. Be creative with your bulletins, announcements etc. They can be leveraged on social and websites too.

Don't: Get burnt out. Digital Fatigue is real. Pace yourself and be mindful of boundaries

5. **Do: Post the tastiest, bite sized bits of information** to hook your audience. Use curiosity marketing as a means of inviting people to learn more (develop an editors eye)

Don't: Post full articles, too much copy can overwhelm your audience at first glance. ie. Invite people to visit your website for full article

6. **Do: Consider the basics of Good Storytelling.** Use your agency as a parish communicator to tell stories. Introduce the story, the characters, the setting, some conflict, a plot and resolution. What is your story? What is the story of your ministry? Your building? Tell your story or the story of a clergy person, choir member or warden etc.

Don't: leave out the juicy bits, or be afraid to be vulnerable.

Authenticity and truth are at the heart of every good story.

7. **Do: Ask Questions and be curious** about the hearts of others. Lean in, Listen and invite participation. Digital is best when there is participation / dialogue and engagement.

Don't: Monologue - use your communications to invite engagement! There are many ways to approach this. The first step is curiosity

It's time to **start a CONVERSATION**

8. **Do: Use video regularly.** Live, short,long, humorous or serious, prayers, petitions, daily gratitude, a Lenten series, reflections on scripture, friendship, family, pets, quilting etc. **Don't** say you're not good on camera. Just film your voice and your hands if you have to but someone has e to show up.

9. **Do: Use digital for event sharing** (services, parish dinners, bake sales, bible study, Alpha etc)

Don't: Just share the event and assume your job is done. You must *Tell the story* of the event. What is it? Why is it happening? Who is hosting? Why does it matter etc.

10. **Do: Make many mistakes** (that's a good sign, it means you are learning, growing and showing up for God

Don't: Be afraid. Guaranteed there will be those who will judge, condemn, complain and criticise. That's part of leadership. Get out there and find your voice!

11. **Do:** Use email, social and website. **They all work together (trifecta)**

Don't underestimate the power of these tools working together.

12. **Do: Find joy** in Digital Communications. There can be profound sense of satisfaction from building digital communities that are healthy and connected

Don't pour yourself into something that you have no energy for. Be sure to prune something before starting something new. Is there something in your parish communicators ministry right now that requires pruning, that could free you up to invest more time in some of these strategies?