

Who is the audience for your newsletter?

Somewhere in school I was taught to always know who my primary audience is and what I wanted them to remember. Those guidelines work for church newsletters.

I suggest our primary audience should be the person who has attended once, had a good enough experience to consider returning, but is not totally sold on our church. If we interest that person, we will also provide the founding member all the information they need

The implications of the audience decision are far reaching. For example, if you send out your newsletter electronically, what appears in the preview portion of the recipient's browser? What do they see which would make them want to open the document and read on. Some churches show only their masthead in the preview section. The founding member or deeply committed member will read on. But will the casual attendee? I like to think of the preview portion as stories USA Today has "above the fold" where the potential customer can see them before buying. Our recipients are our potential customers.

So the opening piece should generate a: "hmmm, this is an interesting church with stuff worth reading about" reaction. That certainly means the list of Sunday lectors should not be at the top! The most exciting article will not get read if people have to wade past the "who is doing what" list. That can go at the end.

Each issue should include a CTA (call to action) or three. CTAs are some activity people can connect with. Yes, if we are not careful we burn out our regulars. But if we are not equally careful we bore our newcomers.

Each issue should include something positive about the work of the church. "We served dinner to over 150 homeless people last week!" This builds up the current members and excites the new person.

Each issue should include the widest possible discussion of activities. Mention something both for senior citizens and children for example. An outdoor workday and making casseroles for the homeless allows different people with different gifts to be interested and involved.

Try to avoid boring eulogies of past events: “The women’s group met for dinner last week and discussed the Christmas bazaar.” The key information can be provided in a more upbeat manner: “Some exciting new ideas were discussed for our annual Christmas bazaar which raises money for church missions.” (Who cares if they ate dinner?)

Avoid “members only” speech. I recently attempted to attend a church. When I reached the front door I found a sign on the ground where it had fallen that said “we are worshiping in the PAC today.” Where is the PAC? I went to another church.

Confession: we had to be reminded that a notice that the Bible study met at Sid’s house was not very helpful to most people. Every week ask: would an unchurched, non-Christian understand every sentence in your newsletter?

You may feel I see the newsletter more as advertising than information dissemination. True. We attempt to capture contact information the first time someone attends and then send them the newsletters from that moment on. If going by USPS, my pattern is to send them newsletters through at least one major church holiday, i.e. Christmas or Easter. If they have not returned I move their names into a Special Event category. They still get postcards or flyers about special events 4 or 5 times a year until I am asked to stop. Electronic newsletters go to them until we receive a request to stop.

Final thought – pray. I pray over the email list and the USPS list asking God to open the recipient’s hearts and minds to feel how much we love God, and love them.