

Communications Plan: St. James Episcopal Church, Piqua, Ohio

Background

St. James Episcopal Church in Piqua, Ohio, a city of 25,502 inhabitants, wishes to increase its visibility in the community and increase its attendance in worship and Christian education. The current average worship attendance is 54.

Church members have already been active in the past two years in promoting their parish. News releases, articles, print ads and aired services among other communication tools have been employed. However, these communication tools lack continuity in messages and visual appeal. Furthermore, effective graphic design is not fully reflected in these communication tools.

The Rev. Robert Baldwin consulted the Diocese of Southern Ohio for its help in polishing St. James' communication efforts. Communications intern Derrick Fetz assisted St. James in creating a communications plan which will help St. James accomplish its goals.

Research

Research is the initial key to a successful communications plan. Statistical information about the geographical area helps determine target audiences and helps create a specific strategy. Statistical information about Piqua was assessed by using Percept statistical data. From the data, key characteristics of the community were identified. Piqua was only projected to grow by one percent in the next five years. This indicates that St. James cannot rely on increases in population to grow.

Diversity in Piqua is very low according to the Percept data. In fact, 94 percent of the population is Anglo. However, the Hispanic population will increase 24 percent in the next five years—an audience which St. James can target for ministry efforts. Around three percent of the population is African American. The largest lifestyle group is middle American families. The largest generational group is the Millennials (those ranging in age from 0 to 20) with 29 percent of the population. The adults in the community have little education experience. In terms of high school graduates, Piqua's population is about four percent below the national average. Only seven percent hold a college degree and four percent hold a graduate degree or higher.

Overall, Piqua's population is receptive to Christian religious organizations. Around 35 percent of the population is not involved in a church. Community members enjoy both contemporary and traditional styles of worship. The main preference for church programming is recreational with 36 percent. Around 85 percent of the households indicate a preference for a particular religious tradition or affiliation.

A phone survey was implemented in Piqua to determine church preferences, to assess how the community views St. James and to seek more effective ways to serve the Piqua community. The survey was completed by 65 individuals in Piqua.

Generally, community members did not know much about the Episcopal Church or St. James. When asked about knowledge of the Episcopal Church, 97 percent responded very little or nothing. When asked about knowledge of St. James, 88 percent said very little or nothing. These statistics indicate that our communications campaign must incorporate tools and strategies to increase visibility.

The most common answers to what first comes to mind about St. James were either nothing or “the church with the red doors.” Respondents indicated that any church should welcome everyone, incorporate children and youth in the life of the church and manifest a solid faith. Respondents indicated that the top two negative aspects of any church were unwelcoming to newcomers and judging others. These statistics tell us not only what peoples’ church preferences are, but indicate what St. James must do better to attract newcomers.

Specific information about the respondents was collected. Among those interviewed 55 percent attended church regularly. The age group which was interviewed the most was the Boomers (40-59) with 25 percent. In terms of education level attained, 42 percent had a high school diploma or G.E.D. and 15 percent had a college education.

To determine the characteristics of the congregation, a revised version of the Percept Congregation Survey was given to 40 of St. James’ members. This survey provided information about church participation, church preferences, life’s satisfactions, personal information, effectiveness of programs and leadership. Every component of this survey is relevant for St. James’ communications campaign because it determines the similarities and differences between the people of St. James and its target audiences.

When asked specific questions about evangelism, 65 percent said they are willing to help with attracting newcomers. Furthermore, 61 percent of the respondents said that St. James’ programming would attract newcomers, but needed some improvement.

Target Audiences

Based on the community’s statistical data, church characteristics and the desires of St. James’ leadership, four target audiences were determined for this communications plan:

- families with young children
- individuals preferring a liturgical/sacramental tradition
- middle class, educated boomers (those aged 40 to 59)
- local media outlets

Goals and Objectives

Goals

There are three main goals for St. James' communications campaign:

- generate positive awareness of St. James and its programs

- attract new individuals and families to St. James

- increase active membership at St. James

Objectives

Four objectives will guide the campaign to achieve the main goals:

- increase the number of families by 10

- increase visibility among community members by 30 percent

- increase the number of visitors by 100 percent

- increase the number of participants by five in each level of children/youth education programs

Communication Tools

To make the communications campaign successful, communication tools that will generate awareness and inform audiences about St. James will be employed. It is important to tailor messages to the defined target audiences and to employ multiple types of communication tools. Furthermore, repetition and consistency are important to allow the messages saturate in the minds of target audiences.

External Communication Tools

These communication tools will generate visibility and invite community members to St. James. The selected tools will fall under two categories awareness and detailed information. Both categories are needed to effectively reach target audiences.

Awareness Communication Tools

- logo: helps identify your church; use a contemporary design of St. James' red doors; place on all communications tools

- slogan: tells something about your church; create a message which includes your church's characteristics and target audiences; include with the logo on all communication tools

St. James Episcopal Church: *Nurturing the hearts AND minds of every generation . . .*

- postcards/door hangers: invites people to your church; create catchy messages on the front; place specific information on the back; keep four-second rule in mind

- newspaper ads: invites people to your church; there are many ads in the papers—make your ads stand out by using rules of graphic design and creative messages; use infrequently
- press releases: informs about special events/happenings; use no more than five times a year—highlight only important events
- articles: informs about specific news; build a good relationship with media to get media attention; make sure news is worthy to the community before wanting an article published
- novelty items: informs/builds attention; examples include T-shirts, pens, notepads, magnets, coffee mugs
- community calendars: informs about events; local newspapers and radio stations create community calendars
- special events: informs about your church, highlights characteristics, generates media attention; examples include ice cream socials, cookouts, sport activities, speakers, receptions, open houses, tours
(please see calendar for specific events)

Informative Communication Tools

- brochure: tells detailed information about your church and its ministries; include information about the Episcopal Church
- fact sheets: highlight specific ministries of your church through fact sheets; create fact sheet with 10 facts about the identity of the Episcopal Church
- website: informs about ministries, contact information, service times and current events
- displays: place in the church or at special events
- newsletter: highlights specific news

Internal Communication Tools

These communication tools will help visitors while they are at the church. The easier you make your visitors' experience the more likely they are to come back. Implement these internal communication tools:

- visitor parking
- greeters: welcome newcomers with well-trained greeters at every main entrance;

have a greeter outside the building as a first contact

- signs: help direct your visitors with signs of important places in the church such as restrooms, nursery, classrooms, office, etc.
- pew pals: assign parishioners to sit with visitors so they can help them through the liturgy
- worship booklets: print the entire liturgy in a worship booklet to make the experience easier for those unfamiliar with the liturgy
produce one according to church season to save paper
- book marks: these will not only make finding hymns easier, but you can include a welcome statement and a brief introduction to Episcopal worship on these also
- welcome table: include a staffed welcome table so newcomers can receive information about your parish and its ministries
- welcome packet: distribute a welcome packet which includes a brochure, fact sheet and some novelty items such as pens or notepads
- inviting facility: maintain a clean, well-kept facility and grounds

Calendar

Creating a calendar helps organize a communications plan and allows organizations to stay focused on their goals. Some parts of St. James' communications plan have already been accomplished. This calendar reflects those accomplishments. The formal campaign will begin in October 2003 and will end in October 2004. However, some events will begin prior October.

June/July

complete research section: Piqua statistics, congregational survey and phone survey;
complete target audiences section; develop goals and objectives; develop budget

August

discuss external and internal communications tools; create slogan; create logo;
redesign newsletter; host special event: ice cream social

September

publish newspaper ad: school routine; design and implement worship booklets, visitor parking, fact sheets, welcome table, greeter outside; hold Pew Pal training; begin designing brochure

October/ November

implement brochure, bookmarks, signs and Pew Pal program; host a tailgate party before a home football game (October); prepare for Advent/Christmas programs

December

distribute door hangers about Advent/Christmas programs; host a fun, family-oriented St. Nicholas celebration on the Feast of St. Nicholas (sponsor with education committee); include a community service activity; publish ad in newspaper one week before Christmas Eve services (use same design as door hangers); publish press release about Christmas events

January

publicize Christian education programs by using flyers and posters (post at library and other community bulletin boards); launch parents group?; run press release about programs; launch website

February/ March

send postcards and distribute posters about Lent/Easter activities (focus on liturgical target audience)

April

publish press release and ad about Easter services; prepare for upcoming programs

May

hold a children's special event; continue current programs

Note: For the summer months, take advantage of community events. Consider participating in festivals, tours, parades and concerts.

June

publicize summer activities through door hangers and posters; follow-up with press release; host a recreational event for families; prepare for Fall programs; begin promoting V.B.S.

July

continue to publicize summer activities; host special event: community-wide cookout; prepare for Fall programs; host V.B.S.

August

publicize back to school and fall activities; host special event: ice cream social

September

host special event: Sunday School kick-off

October

host special event: tailgate party; use paper ads and posters to publicize the tailgate party

November

evaluate communications campaign; see evaluation section for details

Budget

The budget to complete this communications plan is _____. (*Include a breakdown summary of specific expenses.*)

Evaluation

At the end of the campaign, the success of the campaign must be determined. It is important to gather such information as attendance throughout the campaign. Evaluation is needed to assess:

- goals: Were they met?
- objectives: Was each objective met? (Implement a community-wide phone survey to assess the awareness objective.)
- audiences: Did the target audiences respond? Do they need to be different?
- communication tools: Were they effective? Which ones were the best? Which ones were not effective?

This communications plan was created by D. Fetz and the communications department of the Diocese of Southern Ohio and the people of St. James Church, Piqua.