

Toolkit 4:

Getting Noticed

Good communication helps church communities on so many levels. If we can engage quickly and effectively with people who are looking for us or who stumble across us, we'll save time and create a great first impression. Getting the messages right at an early stage says positive things about us as a welcoming, hospitable group of people. Churches might be traditionally perceived as Sunday places, where people sing hymns and say prayers, but we know that they can often be places for all kinds of activity and our buildings can be powerful tools for mission and outreach.

Giving strangers and visitors to our buildings easy access to all the information they need will help them to get to know us quickly. Visitors gravitate towards notice-boards. They say much about the kind of people you are and what you have to offer. It is your opportunity to make a great first impression – this is less about what you say and more about how you say it.

There are other powerful ways of getting noticed. The internet is often the first port of call these days for finding out more about anything. Whether you're planning a holiday or a day out or doing your supermarket shop, the worldwide web is likely to have the answers. Most churches now have their own website and it can be a real asset but only if it's managed and maintained properly. If you decide to have a website, be prepared to make it work for you.

There are other growing, free or inexpensive technologies that can benefit you too, particularly if you want to share information, some of which are detailed below.

A Boundary Sign

You may have different kinds of notice boards, inside and outside of church, and they all have a specific role to play in how you communicate with visitors and tell your story. You will have to be sure that any changes you plan to your signage, inside or out, complies with DAC regulations and you will need to consult your DAC Secretary before you purchase any new boards or move existing signs. Before you plan what it should say consider whether it is in the right place. If you're thinking about getting a new board does it have to go where the old one was? Is this really the best place for it?

There are many different kinds of boundary signs available and yours may be new or a sign that you have had for years that needs some attention. It might be a 'top of the range' model or a very simple board. No matter what it is like it needs to be in good order. No peeling paint or varnish! Ask yourself what the picture below says about the church it represents.

Most importantly, be welcoming! Along with the regular service information try to show that your church is alive and open at other times, not just on Sundays.

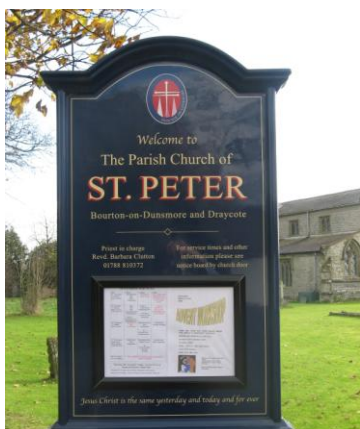
Make sure it is easy to read from a safe distance – not too high from the ground - and that the lettering is not too small.

Don't be tempted to put too much specific information on it, like names and telephone numbers that could date easily – take into



account the fact that your vicar may change and the churchwardens may retire, so think longer-term. It should be easy to get to and access – so not behind an encroaching holly bush or on a slope.

If it has a glass or Perspex section make sure that it is weatherproof. If your church is in a vulnerable area or liable to vandalism, take this into account when planning for a new sign.



If you have space to display posters or flyers make sure they always look fresh and that they are changed frequently to maintain a level of interest. Faded, curling, out of date information can give the wrong impression about you. Obviously, the bigger the board the more information you can include, but if it is small keep the information to a minimum. Less is definitely more, as in the example on the left.

If you're open to visitors, say so - even if it's only for a few hours a day. Display and explain contact information for those who may want access out of hours or need more help. If your board is small you may want to signpost them to your porch or inside church itself.

Temporary Signage

A-Boards are a great way of saying –'We're Open!' You can drag them out of church whenever you're ready to welcome visitors. They should be eye-catching and visible. Just using a statement like

'Welcome to St. Peter's! Come inside and explore our beautiful/peaceful/historic/unique church!'

is enough and if you have a notable or interesting feature to share, say so.

'Welcome to St. John Baptist. Our Peaceful Norman Crypt is open to visitors'

You can always give more information in the porch or inside church itself, but this initial invitation will help entice the visitor to come in and explore further.



Internal Notice-boards

Once you have tempted the visitor into church there are more opportunities to use your notice-boards to say good things about what you have to offer.

Echo the overall look of your boundary board in your internal boards. Be consistent with colours, fonts, styles to create an in-house format. This gives a sense of uniformity and commonality. You can carry this through to all written material or resources you might offer to the visitor. Laminate as much permanent information as you can, with a matt finish.



Think about using a stand-alone, double-sided notice-board that you can rotate – one side for visitor information and the other for Sunday worshippers. Make sure you display lots of photographs of your people enjoying social activity to emphasise that you are a living, breathing place and not a museum. Remember to include a smiling snap of your Vicar and other key workers in your church.

Nominate someone to be your Notice-board Tsar and tell everyone that this person has responsibility for maintaining and managing the space. If anyone wants to display information it has to go through this person who monitors the material and keeps it up to date. It's always disappointing to see a poster for a church fete held three weekends ago!

Special Information Space for Visitors

If you have room try to reserve space on a specific board to welcome your visitors and put this close to the door. Say where the nearest public loo is or where the visitor can get a good lunch. There might be an excellent walk that can be accessed from church so if there is, tell them about it. Make sure you don't lump this kind of information in with the flower rota or the PCC minutes!

Getting this right suggests to a visitor that you have thought about their needs and that your welcome to them is important to you – your welcome to them is a valuable part of your church's ministry.

A Church Website

Your church website is a repository of information and news about your church, your community and your activities. You'll need to nominate a webmaster who is responsible for updating and reviewing the site as part of a larger team of three or four if you have the capacity. If you are part of a larger benefice, each church should ideally have a representative to collaborate with the webmaster and forward content and news.

It's **extremely** important to regularly review the site to check that it's working for you. Websites are pointless if they are full of outdated news and information so make sure that you regularly review the content to check this. An advert for an event that took place three months ago is off-putting to visitors of the site and reduces their confidence in the content.

You can build a church website from your own desk top PC for very little cost. If you have a confident webmaster who is prepared to build the site for you start with www.create.net and if you need more help try www.churchedit.co.uk/ both of which come highly recommended.

Using QR Codes

By 2014 there will be more Smart phones on our planet than desktop PCs. We no longer have to depend on static, paper based sources of information. Recent developments in bar-code technology have led to



the Quick Response (QR) code being seen everywhere, particularly in newspapers and in advertising where space costs money. They can be created **for free**. A Smartphone user can scan this code with their camera, using software from a downloadable App, and it will take them to the relevant website. You can create a code for your own church website or other web pages that feature information about your church.

You could put the QR code on your church noticeboard or if you have a special events page on your website you could create a code for that and circulate it in the parish newsletter to save space. There might be a parent and toddler group that meet in church, or there may be some pages about your church history on someone else's web page.

Try this link and create your own www.the-qrcode-generator.com/

The power of Wiki

If you don't have your own website you can still create a web presence to tell the story of your church and its history by using Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopaedia written entirely by volunteers. Pages are continually being created and updated and it is very easy to edit. A quick internet search is likely to reveal a page about your town or even your church. If it doesn't, you can create your own by registering on the Wikipedia site.



It's entirely free and there will be other 'editors' out there who will add information, pictures and links to the pages and in some cases even translate it for you. This might be a project that you could explore with your Local History or Civic Society for example.

PR and Marketing Ideas

If your church is a large and lively it will be worth having a small team to deal with communications. In smaller churches that may be off the beaten track it is still important to have a communications strategy. If you are planning a high-profile event or need to share good news widely with radio or newspapers you'll need to write a press release – you can get help with this here from the Diocese of York www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/your-church/communications/writing-a-press-release/

There are excellent publications that may help you also.

'How to be Heard in a Noisy World' by Phil Creighton
ISBN 978-1-85078-716-7

'100 Ways to get your Church Noticed' by Neil Pugmire
ISBN 1-84291-240-2

Working together with



Updated February 2014
helen.mcgowan@btconnect.com