

Communications Strategy for the Connexional Team

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Toby Scott, Director of Communications and Campaigns x5221
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Information
Draft Resolution	
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This summary paper sets out the principles behind strategic communications by the Connexional Team and the required policies arising from these. A full version of the paper is available on request.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications will be researched, planned, implemented and reviewed • All communications will be two-way, and the Team will act on what it "hears" • The strategy itself and the background research will be reviewed at least biennially. • The same process will also develop internal communications
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	MC/08/96 was discussed by the Council in small groups in October 2008.
Consultations	The Methodist Council; communications specialists in the Team, the Strategic Leaders

Summary of Impact

Wider Connexional	The report calls for more research on how best to communicate with certain groups within the Connexion.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The strategy requires closer working with relevant ecumenical colleagues in communications planning

CONNEXIONAL TEAM COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2009-10

1) Communication strategy summary 2009-10

Providing a highly professional and distinctively Christian coordinated strategic communication service to the Connexional Team.

This will be based on two principles, which are best practice elsewhere:

- 1) The best communications are two-way, and involve as much “listening” as speaking. This means in practice that all communication methods must contain ways for information to flow back, and that the Team, from senior staff down, must commit to acting on what we hear.
- 2) All communications will follow a circular four-step pattern: research, plan, do, review, with the review analysis feeding back into the next round of research. In practice this means that we must allow time and budget for proper research and planning before we communicate, and time and if necessary budget for research afterwards to see if the communication had the desired effect.

2) Problem statement

The core issue is: how do we best share information and news of the work of the Team and where possible from around the Connexion with the whole of the Church, in order to encourage, enable and resource those undertaking the mission of the Church?

Another way of phrasing this is: What policies, procedures and strategies are required for the Connexional Team to best communicate with its key publics, recognising that one of the key tasks of all such communications is to encourage and enable those key publics to contribute to the mission of the Church?

3) Messages for 2009-10

These messages were agreed at a meeting of the strategic leaders in June 2009.

These messages are not to limit what we will talk about, but rather the framework through which we talk about other things. For example, Venture FX and the Youth Participation Strategy are both major pieces of work that we will address directly, but we will discuss them to support one or more of these messages (e.g. the YPS is discussed in the context of speaking confidently of God, of discipleship and as example of what the Team can do to serve the Connexion.)

1. “Speaking confidently of God.” This follows on from the Time to Talk of God report from 2005. There is a lot to unpack in this, but one summary would be for all our communications to say: We do what we do, because of our Christian faith, because we want to share this, and to make more followers of Jesus Christ. Our communications will “boast of nothing but Christ and him crucified.”
In practice this will not mean simply sticking “God-talk” into every communication. Rather it will mean taking the opportunities where they arise to repeat that the reason for our work – whether that is public issues, social justice, world church etc. - is because of the faith we have. Individual programmes will continue to be driven by a response to the needs of the world, but we will where possible stress the God-given origins of our responses.
2. From 2009-10 onwards the Team will focus on supporting and encouraging, enabling and resourcing whole life discipleship across the whole Church. This is a response to

what the strategic leaders have heard from the Connexion.

This is a multi-year project and needs clear direction. It is something that will influence the whole work of the Team and the whole life of the Church, and as such as need clear planning over the life of this campaign.

3. “Mother Church” This recognises that for many Methodists around the world the British Connexion is seen as the “home” of Methodism. This makes many Methodists feel uncomfortable as we treat our partner churches as equal partners, and also because in many cases the founding of our nations' Methodist churches came as a result of colonialism. Nonetheless, this is a challenge for us, and we need to address it and respond. Topics to include under this message are discussing conduit funding and the 2010 All Partners Consultation.
4. The new Team and how it serves the Connexion. This is our last year where we can talk about the “new” Team. There are many practical changes taking place that show how the Team works to serve the Connexion, such as the property consents process or the new grant making system. We can also point to Hope in God's Future and our work on the financial crisis as examples. We need to adopt the “highly professional, distinctively Christian” idea as both a good phrase to describe the Team and a realistic summary of how we approach our work.
5. Fund-raising This is a major change, in that we are modernizing our fund-raising, whilst at the same time the funds themselves are being relaunched. Fund raising done properly also opens up whole new communication channels: whilst we do not have the names and addresses of individual Methodist members, we will start to accumulate the names of individual donors, who we intend to write to regularly. The developing fund raising work will also benefit overall communications, as it will for the first time give us direct contact information for and a means to communicate with people who are active enough in Church life to give or organise the giving of others.

4) Strategy

The structure of the Church makes it in practice impossible to produce a single, detailed communications strategy as too much is prone to change or revision at short notice. However, it is possible to set out strategic principles, which in turn give rise to specific policies, that enable us to communicate strategically and yet flexibly. And it is possible, by crafting the messages above that support our overall Team strategy in pursuit of identified goals, to set out a general communications plan that is regularly updated.

The Team has limited resources and must make the best use of available channels, cutting those that do not serve the purposes, and looking at developing new channels where necessary.

The communications strategy combines the following elements:

1. All communications will be done on the following basis: research; plan; execute; review. This is communications best practice and is necessary for minimising waste.
2. This four step process will for each communication (or related group of communications) produce a communications plan that will be written and agreed before the execution phase of each, and will include an agreed date for review. The research and planning phase of each of these will weigh them against the agreed objectives and messages of the Team as a whole.
3. All communications channels will aspire to be two-way: to enable “listening” as well as “speaking.”

4. The Team will look to develop electronic communications wherever possible, whilst recognising that these are not panaceas. The majority of our membership continue to rely more on print communications.
5. With the creation of Methodist Publishing, it is possible for the first time to have a single coordinated approach to all printed materials, and creating this under the control of the new post of Publishing Manager and the DCC is essential. The Methodist Publishing Manager will produce and make available a publishing plan.
6. We will develop better uses of database-driven communications, in both print and electronic form. Although this requires more work in developing the database, it will produce more targeted communications, and reduce the need for overprinting and storing items in a warehouse.
7. A standard and effective strategy in communications is to appeal to people's self interest. This will work for us, but with the additional understanding that we do this because the Team exists to support the Connexion in the overall mission of the Church. We are genuinely seeking to support their work and ease their load. If we are providing tools people need to do their mission, they will be more receptive. And if we ask them to do a bit of work now (e.g. helping us tailor communications to a particular group) it will be to ease part of their burden in the long run.
8. We will in time seek to develop ways to communicate directly with our members and regular attenders. This will initially develop as part of the fund-raising strategy, as that will be regular communicating with those who give to one or more of the funds, and this latter group is by definition active in church life. It is therefore in our interests to keep that group informed as to what it going on.
9. Underlying all of our communications with particular groups, but especially with the "general membership" will be the goals of answering two questions they might have:
1) What is going on in the Church? 2) How can I join in?
10. We will build on our use of a common house main body font to develop an overall style bible for all printed resources. This will give us a stronger visual identity and also make it easier to place work with freelance designers.
11. Our communications planning will be part of the general strategic and policy planning, as set out in the document Strategy, Policy and Programme Development in the Connexional Team. The overall process set out in that paper is the same as the process set out here, and there are clear points in that process that the communications work will tie into.

Our communication strategy is therefore: to communicate with key groups across the Church, and in the wider world, in order to encourage and enable those within the Church engaged in our mission, and to promote the Church and its work to the wider world. We will use all relevant media, but our publications work will be focussed on serving the Methodist people rather than pursuing a wider audience. We will provide crisis communications support to the whole Connexion. In all our communications we will research, plan, do and review, and all of our communications will be two way where possible, with a commitment from the Team to act on what we hear. In all this we act because we want to share the love of Jesus Christ as widely as possible, and to make more followers of Him. We will be honest, and we will be creative with everything except the facts.

5) Issues and Crisis Management

Crisis management

A crisis is defined in this context as anything that has the potential to harm the reputation of the Church. It is important that all Connexional Team staff and senior district people understand this definition: it is not just about "naughty ministers" or fires in churches.

Using this definition, it is important that anyone in the Connexional Team becoming aware of an actual or potential crisis immediately informs:

- Their immediate line manager
- The Lead Media Officer
- The Director of Communications
- The relevant cluster head
- Any relevant specialist staff: e.g. the head of safeguarding, Property Secretary, head of the Governance Support Cluster etc.

In all instances, we will:

- 1) Seek to be as well prepared as possible in advance of a story breaking.
- 2) We will take all possible crises seriously.
- 3) We will monitor effectively.
- 4) We will in our crisis statements and in our actions show that we care about what is happening, we share the concerns of those involved and we are taking action both to address the immediate issue and to reduce the chances of it happening again.

6) Main message channels

- Website
- Emails
- Stipend Mailing
- Link Mailing/Momentum
- Press releases
- The Buzz/E-news
- The Conference
- Methodist Recorder

7) Main publics

- Connexional Team
- Chairs
- Connexional Leaders Forum
- Superintendents
- Ministers
- Lay workers in district and circuits youth workers, Training Officers, District Development Enablers etc.
- Donors to Methodist funds
- Bloggers
- Chaplains
- People in the pews
- Media
- Local preachers and worship leaders
- Synod secretaries

8) Blogging and social media

Blogs, and social media such as Facebook or Twitter, are key modern means of communication. They present particular challenges and opportunities for the Church, as well as hazards for the Connexional Team members who use them or engage with them. A draft paper for the Connexional Team is in progress and available on request.

Appendix 1

Research

This section reflects work that needs to be done on an annual or biennial basis in order to ensure that it is current. It then forms the background to all of the communications work in the main part of this report. It is separated here for simplicity.

This section, and the work on publics and channels above, could not have been done without the help of the Council.

Situational Analysis

The Methodist Church in Britain is still a major organisation, with a membership comparable if not bigger than any of the political parties, and a large number of buildings across almost the whole of Great Britain. It has been in numerical decline for a long time, and faces an ageing membership. But this “decline narrative” masks areas of growth, and also ignores that many similar organisations face similar challenges (To give an extreme example, Britain’s pubs are closing at a faster rate and predicted to be extinct long before the Methodist Church.)

I am grateful to the input of members of the Council in this section, as their work on this was particularly timely and important. Further conversations with other groups in the Church have also helped fill this out.

SWOT analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Based in one geographical area Committed and gifted people. Good at what we do. “Word in Time” Clearly defined areas of responsibility Fruitful external relationships Desire to have strategic outlook Permission to dream Sense of vocation Positive team culture Fast working together – e.g. bus campaign Effective, enduring products e.g. in your pockets Pres and VP blog, and blogging in general – innovative Confident in our skills Responsive Variety of backgrounds</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Poor quality production in audio Weak at communicating with the membership Poor market research of core audiences Have got the whole Connexional Team doing good communications Time management Get people to work outside job descriptions Intranet Accounting/finance IT Poor work life balance External perception of Methodism No understanding of people’s capacity Inability to say No Top level vision tends to appear committee led Reluctance to take difficult decisions “Because we have always done it this way” Lack of systems across boundaries</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Engaging a new move towards spiritual</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Misconduct</p>

reflection Permission to dream New Team – anything possible Develop Connexional database IT Review New intranet Start engaging with donors Working with video Market research post Heritage officer New front desk area Seasonal campaigns Connexional travel provisions Sponsorship Methodist flags External environment – downturn Proving our relevance Establish media service identity Re-branding?	Declining membership Doom mentality Rising age demographic Disillusionment Media fragmentation Political correctness Declining income Connexional work plan Domination by CofE of media and public perception Secular society Being defined by single issues Apathy Connexional Team not working with Communications
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Appendix 2: Quick overview of communications strategy for each new major piece of work

This builds on the Gleam in the Eye form, and many of the questions in that answer the topics raised here.

The out line of a communications strategy for any new project is:

Background – primary and secondary research into the topic at hand and organisations or groups involved

Situation analysis – a brief statement of the current situation and the problem to be addressed

Central core of difficulty – a one sentence statement of the heart of the problem, and if necessary the harm that will occur if it is not addressed

Preliminary identification of publics and resources

Campaign goal(s) – the ends to be achieved

Objective – specific, measureable and time-bound results that will measure the success or otherwise of meeting the goals

Key publics – those audiences necessary to achieve the goals. Identify self interests to help develop messages; current relationship of each to the Team and who or what influences them

Messages – primary and secondary for each public

Strategies – specific strategies for each public

Tactics – channels for each message to each public

Calendar – planned timing for each of these. Also to include end-date for campaign and review

Budget

Communication confirmation

Key public	Self interests	Influentials	Strategy	Tactics	Messages	
1						
2						
3						

Evaluation

Worked example of the above for Hope in God's Future, focussing on the project to consult widely on the practical outcomes of the report.

Background	The 2009 Methodist Conference passed a resolution calling for a wide consultation about how bring about a 80% reduction in the Church's carbon footprint by 2050, including reviewing policies (including travel), energy audits of buildings etc. in time to report back to Conference in 2010.
Situation analysis	Although the Church has long since spoken out on climate change, we do not know how many buildings have had an energy audit or are suitable for e.g. solar water heating on the roof. Church life and work generate a lot of travel, especially overseas air travel for those working on world church relationships.
Central core of difficulty	How do we consult widely with key stakeholders on this topic in time to bring workable proposals back to Conference 2010.
Preliminary identification of publics and resources	Key publics: Ministers (who might be required to have solar heating on manse roofs) District and circuit property secretaries District and circuit treasurers (who will have concerns about paying for this) World church relationships staff, companions All who drive to church Resources: Website and email (since we want to reduce carbon footprint by minimising printing)
Campaign goal(s)	To achieve a wide understanding of the purpose of this project amongst those most likely to be affected by it; to maintain awareness of climate change as an issue and the Church's response to it.
Objective	To achieve a response rate of at 5% from each key stakeholder group to the consultation.
Key publics	Ministers; property secretaries; WCR staff, companions, mission partners and partner churches. Treasurers
Messages	1) We are committed to making these cuts – this is about how best to go about it 2) We all have a responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint 3) Although expensive and awkward now, this can save money in the long run by cutting fuel consumption
Strategies	As this is a consultation, the overall strategy is to enable people to respond. This can be via a website, by email or other online means. However, to enable the conversation we do need to provide resources for people to get started. The HIGF book is one such. We should provide links to other relevant resources. The strategy is not to threaten people, but to involve them in meeting the challenge Conference has set us.
Tactics	Ministers can be reached by the stipend mailing, property people by Property Points. WCR staff are in MCH and can be involved in face to face meetings. Companions, mission partners and partner churches might have to be reached one at a time by phone or personal email, unless there are any planned events in time.
Calendar	The consultation needs to be complete by January 2010.
Budget	

Key public	Self interests	Influentials	Strategy	Tactics	Messages	
1 Ministers	Presents an opportunity to shape the changes	Chairs	Involve early in the conversation since they will be affected by many of the changes;	Stipend mailing	1.	
2 Property secretaries	An opportunity to be involved from the start of the process	Ministers, chairs	Involve early in the conversation since they will be affected by many of the changes;	Property points	1	
3 Treasurers	This can save money in the long run; some grant support may be available	Chairs	Stress the extent to which other funding will be available	Direct communication	3	
4 World church	Threatened by any move to reduce air travel	Partners	Address head on the tension between the requirement to cut carbon footprint and the Methodist passion for supporting mission around the world	Face to face	2	

Evaluation

Check level of responses each week, and give more publicity to the consultation if levels not satisfactory. After end date of consultation review response levels and seek to determine which areas fell short and why.