

“What’s Happening: Utilizing Public Service Announcements”

Many small churches avoid advertising because it bears an intimidating price tag. However, almost all newspapers, radio stations, and cable providers offer non-profit organizations the opportunity to inform the public about their upcoming events at no charge. Public service announcements (PSA’s) can be of greater value than you may realize. The price is definitely right. So why aren’t you doing it?

- *I get frustrated with composition.* You do not have to be Pulitzer prize winner to implant who, what, when, and where into a few sentences. It does not have to be a tedious chore. Often a previous PSA can simply be altered with new information. Make sure you use your spell checker.
- *I tried it but nobody came.* You cannot gauge the value of sending PSA’s by a few attempts. Visitors may not crowd in for your cantata, but readers will notice that something is happening at your church. Constant exposure can shape public perception. I always enjoy making a new acquaintance who responds, “Oh, your church is having that candlelight service on Christmas eve.” Even if they never come, it opened a door of conversation.
- *I can never remember to send it at the right time.* An organized secretary can usually remedy that problem. Why not take an hour and create all the PSA’s for the next three months. The delayed delivery feature with most fax and email software allows you the luxury of creating a batch of PSA’s that will not be delivered for several weeks (or months). You may even impress yourself.

Willing to give it a try? Here are a few tips to help you get ready.

- Read other PSA’s to get some ideas. What stands out to you in another announcement? Why? Newspapers with large circulation usually have a document to guide you in the creation and submission process of PSA’s.
- Be prepared for the publisher to edit your submission. Remember--it is free.
- Research all the possible opportunities. Do not forget the smaller newspapers that deliver only once a week. Some trading publications that print monthly have a “what’s happening” section. Maybe the local library will post a PSA that is sent their way.
- Save a copy of all PSA’s you send. Glancing through the archives will help the creative juices flow. You may only need to change the date for an annual event.

Are you ready to write? Remember the four rules for creating a good PSA.

1. **Be early.** Know the deadlines and get your copy in before it is too late. Rarely is a PSA misplaced because it was submitted too early. They file things differently than we do.
2. **Be brief.** This is not a sermon. Space is money to the media.
3. **Be clear.** Ask someone to read your copy to insure that it is not ambiguous or obscure. Even if you provide a phone number, people usually do not call for clarification.
4. **Be unique.** Work at making your announcement stand out. How many other Easter Sunrise services will be mentioned along side yours? Do not sacrifice clarity for creativity.

Your copy is ready, but how do you dispatch your PSA?

- Chose a method that utilizes a one-to-many delivery system. Create a group list of recipients, compose a general PSA, and deliver it in a uniform fashion. It is best to pick a method of dispatching that works well for every destination.
- The most effective and efficient method is by fax. If you have a computer, you probably have everything you need to begin sending faxes. Many computers come with faxing software such as Microsoft Windows (do a search for “fax” in your windows help). The premier faxing program is Symantec WinFax Pro[®]. I recommend the investment.
- Email is growing in popularity as a method of dispatching PSA’s. However, some media outfits are not yet utilizing this as a conduit for communication. Most email programs (i.e. MS Outlook[®]) allow you to assign a number of addresses to a group. Selecting the group name will dispatch an identical PSA to each address in the group. Make sure to put the group name in the blind copy field (BCC) so each recipient only sees their own address.
- The postal service is the least desirable method. Address labels could be easily generated for the different media destinations and then affixed to a PSA postcard.

The effort is minimal, but the return could be quite productive. You should never dismiss the potential of God providentially leading someone to your church because they spotted your PSA.

Pastor Carl Wood

