

Progress report on the Connexional Team Communications strategy

Basic Information

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Status of Paper	Interim - A final report will be ready for the October Council
Action Required	Information
Draft Resolution	
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	A brief update on work to date on the Connexional Team Communications Strategy
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to date • Work still to be completed • Further research including responses to Link Mailing • Policy changes • Feedback from Council groups • Link mailing survey analysis
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	MC/08/96 – the original report to the Council (October 2008), which explored the principles by which the Director of Communications and Campaigns will create a communications strategy for the Connexional Team. Council members discussed key questions in small groups.
Consultations	Communications staff, October Council

Summary of Impact

(Note, if appropriate, as possible, likely or confirmed. If detailed explanation is necessary, include this in the full paper, clearly identified.)

None.

Update report on the Connexional Team Communications Strategy

1. Work to date

Following the presentation of the original paper at the October Council (MC/08/96) and the work done by the Council in groups, the notes from the scribes were collated into the basic research for the strategy. I am extremely grateful to the members of the Council for their invaluable help in this area. (A summary appears in Appendix A).

In December the lead communication staff in the Connexional Team had an away day to further work on the strategy, and we were able to make considerable further progress, details of which are given below.

2. Work still to be completed

All of the preparatory work has been done, and much of the resultant thinking is complete. What remains is for all of this to be drawn together as a whole strategy, and this work will be completed in the coming months. Drafts will be circulated to senior staff in the Team before Conference, and the final report will be ready for the first Council meeting of 2009/10.

Although I am personally disappointed that I have not been able to meet the targets I originally set for myself, the principal reason that the strategy is not complete is because of the work that Janet Morley and I have had to do on the creation of Methodist Publishing. This has proven to be much more time consuming than originally expected, and clearly has to be completed within a set time table. This has had a knock on effect on much other work.

3. Further research

One benefit of the delay in producing the strategy is that I will be able to incorporate some recent research on the Link Mailing, Momentum and people's attitudes to our existing communications. This has already produced some very useful data: for example, that the Link Mailing is much more popular than initially expected (see Appendix B). Bearing in mind all the research we will in the new Connexional year 2009/10 be reinstating the Link Mailing, with a contemporary new format.

4. Policy changes

One of the biggest outcomes from the strategy will be several policy suggestions about how to ensure that the Team communicates in the best ways possible. For example, one of these will relate to how the Team uses email to communicate with various key groups in the Connexion. This policy will recognise that email is a very effective means of communicating, but that not every member of some groups has email, and also that it is easy to overuse or misuse. The strategy will therefore recommend a policy to control and coordinate mass email communications between the Team and the Connexion in order to make best use of this communications channel.

Other similar policies will emerge from the strategy, although the goal is to trust people's common sense where possible. I do not wish the strategy to produce only pages of new instruction for staff.

5. Details of work to date

Strategy part	Progress	Notes
Situational analysis	Complete	
Problem statement	Complete	
Communications objectives	Partially complete	
Publics and partners	Listing complete; analysis not complete	
Stakeholder analysis	Complete	
Messages	Not done	This will only be a high level message overview; it does not make sense to try to incorporate detailed messages at this stage
Strategy	Not done	This is always one of the later sections
Issues and crisis management	Not done	This has to wait until the earlier work is complete
Channels	Complete	
Publics, messages and tactics	Not done	
Timing	Not done	Much of this is beyond our control
Budget	Complete	There is no need for a separate budget for this strategy – it is part of the overall communications budget
Evaluation and review	Not done	Obviously, the actual evaluation and review happens later; what needs to be done at this point is the set the criteria by which it will be evaluated

TGMS 12iii09

Appendix A

Feedback from Council groups

What do you think is the Methodist Church's reputation in the wider world? And what would you like it to be?

Most of the responses focused on a “thou shalt not” or just “don’t drink.” Also an organisation that feels uncomfortable blowing its own trumpet.

We would like to be known as an organisation that meets people’s needs.

What does the Methodist Church fail to communicate that we should?

We don’t get enough of our passion for justice and the Gospel. Our existing publications can seem a bit dowdy or old-fashioned, and too often too much information is sent to people who are too busy to do much with it.

We also need to communicate more with a goal of spurring people – the membership – into action. We need to do more to allow ordinary people to speak of their faith, to have confidence and to communicate without fear.

We need to move away from the notion that only someone with a dog collar can speak on behalf of the Church.

Which are our three most important publics? For each of those, which are the best means of communicating with them?

One group felt that we have two publics – those within the Church, and those without. (Although this is true, I feel that this is too broad a distinction to help create a detailed strategy.)

One group helpfully pointed out “those who come onto Church premises” as a key group. This fits in with the need to improve our body language identified in the ground clearing projects, and my own feeling that we act as if each visitor is coming into a Methodist church for the first and possibly the only time in their lives: what do they take away from that visit?

Ignoring costs for the moment, can you suggest three new ways of communicating both within the Church and with those outside it.

This generated some good ideas, mostly using new technologies such as Facebook or blogs. But a couple of suggestions were not new ideas, but still very good ones: regular briefing papers on current topics; and better and wider training for media spokespeople.

What are three key messages you would like to see the Team put across in 2009-2010? Who is each message aimed at?

This question has been slightly overtaken by the decision to focus on lay discipleship in 2009-10, but this discussing still generated some good comments about communication methods. One strong idea was to give “ordinary Methodists” better information about what is happening around the Connexion, and also what is being discussed at the Council and the Conference.

One clear message that came from all the groups was that we need to do more. Given that we do not have infinite resources, this means in reality that the role of the Team might be doing more to support Districts and circuits in their work – which will fall heavily on volunteers, in which case we will have to do a little less ourselves.

One voice made a strong case for greater investment in communications, especially in online work. Naturally, I am all in favour of having more to spend, but we have to be realistic about the level of funds available to the Team right now.

Appendix B

Analysis of Link Mailing Market Research

Link mailing has around 7000 recipients. We have received 731 responses – 612 by post and 119 online – this seems to be a very high response rate and certainly higher than we anticipated.

Some sections weren't answered and some ticked more than one option.

Responders:

Presbyters/Deacons	123
Link Mailing contacts	520
Individual subscribers	10

Personal usage

Read most of it	488
Read certain parts	173
Don't have time to read but retain for reference	38
Have no use for	31

A large number of respondents said that what they actually did was to skim the inserts to decide who best to pass them on to. There were a few who also crossed out the word most and replaced it with the word all.

Where certain parts were specified this was usually Safeguarding although the recent Lent Resources got a couple of mentions.

Wider usage

Distribute all	470
Pass on parts	173
Pin parts to notice boards	368
Don't pass on	64

Most of those who said that they did not pass the mailing on were Presbyters/Deacons who commented that they kept their copy as the Link Mailing contact actually distributed the inserts.

Those who specified the parts they passed on most frequently mentioned Safeguarding, although Mission Matters and Public Issues also featured.

Those who said they pinned parts to the notice boards most frequently mentioned using the poster. There were also a fair number who said that all of the inserts were put on a table for people to take/read or pinned to a board. Mention was also made that some churches kept all of the inserts in folders for reference.

Appearance

Like as is	553
Attractive but not convenient	47
Not attractive but convenient	56
Neither attractive nor convenient	27

An overwhelming vote for it being attractive and convenient. Most of the comments on it not being convenient were concerning it being double sided when people wanted to pin it up. Others felt that A5 would be a better format. Some comment was made that the poster would be better if it was A4 as A3 was too big for some notice boards and others said the poster was often too damaged in transit to be used.

Alternative ways of receiving

Electronic	65
Both	171
Print	444

Not surprisingly almost all of the online responses ticked for electronic or both. There were a very large number of responses that said although they could receive things electronically they preferred print. The main reasons mentioned were time and cost of printing things for onward distribution and the quality of home printers. Others mentioned that they didn't feel that things received electronically would be read as much as the printed versions.