



TOPTIPS

EDITING A CHURCH MAGAZINE

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So you've been asked to take over a flagging church magazine, or even set one up for the first time – and you have a limited budget. Where do you start? Church magazine editor Jill Arrowsmith offers some advice:

What kind of magazine?

- What is the purpose of the magazine? Will it be primarily a newsletter, reporting on past and future events? Will it contain devotional articles or is it intended to be an evangelistic tool, for people to pass on to their non-Christian friends? Will the content be entirely Christian or include some items of secular interest? You may want your magazine to serve all these purposes so you will need to choose the content with care.
- What are you going to call the magazine?
- Is this to be a monthly publication? Bear in mind that as soon as one issue has been distributed, you will have to start work on the next. You must be able to anticipate a ready flow of articles.
- Will you be charging for copies?
- Will you accept advertisements? If so, start with a written policy, rather than let it evolve.

Format

The traditional church magazine tends to be printed in landscape on A4 pages which are folded and stapled inside a cover, producing an A5 format. This provides flexibility in the number of pages but costs more to produce. Modern magazines are now printed on folded A3 sheets to produce an A4 format and the final result is usually restricted to eight pages (ie two sheets of A3).

Identify your readership

Your choice of articles will depend upon the type of people you have in your congregation. Do they prefer a light, easy-to-read style of writing? Or are there a lot of academics who would enjoy in depth theological analyses? Do you need to include a children's page? Are jokes and cartoons appropriate?

Technology

- The days of typing the church magazine on a manual typewriter and running it off on a temperamental duplicator are gone. Your budget may be low but if your magazine is to project an image of your church as a modern institution in tune with today's culture, it must be produced on a computer and printed on a high quality photocopier or printed professionally.
- Microsoft Word will enable you to produce text but if you want to format your text into columns, and include graphics and photographs, then it is better to use a desk top publishing programme. A basic programme such as Microsoft Publisher is not expensive and quite easy to learn.
- Use the same font throughout the magazine, except perhaps for advertisements. Either Arial or Times Roman are easy to read.
- If you want to include photographs, you will need a scanner. These are now inexpensive to buy.
- Make use of the gifts available in your congregation. Is there a graphic designer who could set a template with a background grid for each page and design a masthead?
- Your local library will have books to help you learn about design and typesetting. Or pick up tips

from professionally produced magazines.

- The use of colour will considerably increase the cost of printing, but it will be worth the expense, particularly for photographs.
- Encourage contributors to the magazine to send you their articles by email. This will reduce the amount of typing you have to do.

Content

- Set your deadline with care. Consider how long it will take you to typeset the magazine and have it printed. Allow plenty of time for proof-reading.
- Plan ahead. Don't wait for the deadline before you begin thinking about the content of the next issue.
- Check the church diary for forthcoming events. Make sure you have accurate information regarding times and venues. Ask church members to write about the activities they are involved in.
- Set parameters for items to be included under 'Fellowship News'. If you try to include everything, you will inevitably leave some people out. You may need to ask permission before printing some news and people's addresses. Decide in advance whether you will accept advertisements for items for sale.
- The traditional 'minister's letter' is now a little old fashioned. Try to find one article, not necessarily written by the minister, that can fill the front page and catch people's interest.
- Warn contributors that you may have to edit their articles if they are too long. Many will be happy for you to do this. If others object, show them the edited article before you print it.
- Accept that some people who have promised to contribute may let you down. Have a stock of articles ready to insert on the unexpected blank page. Scour other church magazines (but ask for permission before reprinting). The same holds true for Christian magazines and websites.
- Clipart can brighten a page of solid text, but use it sparingly.

Useful Websites

Missionary societies and organisations such as Christian Aid and the Bible Society all have their own websites and many include articles that can be reprinted in church magazines. Some websites that give advice to editors may require a small subscription.

www.christianaid.org.uk www.biblesociety.org.uk

www.churcheditors.org www.parishpump.co.uk

www.thesheepdip.co.uk www.cartoonchurch.com

www.bmsworldmission.org/worldnews

Related resource: Tips on producing newsletters and magazines are available in Getting the Message Across which is available at: <http://www.baptist.org.uk/resources/a-z.asp?section=57>

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