

CHAPTER 4

Hospitality and Public Relations

Conveying the Warmth and Caring of Your Congregation

A New Life Ministries Report

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A New Look at Public Relations

For some, the term “public relations” brings to mind press releases, slick brochures, and the creation of an ideal image in the eyes of the public. For others, the term implies the use of expensive experts by politicians and media personalities in an effort to gain favorable publicity - or to cover up their misconduct! Those images are uncomfortable to those of us in the life of the church.

Yet central to our mission is the calling to reach out to others, and we want people to have a view of the church which will cause them to want to participate. The church offers a way of life very different than that portrayed by media personalities and politicians. It is a way of life for which people hunger. In his classic book *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen wrote:

In our world full of strangers, estranged from their past, culture and country, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found.

Public relations for the church can be more broadly defined as **the sum total of all the interactions the church has with the public**. The church’s public relation activities certainly should include traditional press releases about new programs with resulting publicity through local newspapers, television stations, and community calendar listing on radio stations. But public relations also includes such things as:

- ◆ Service projects in the community
- ◆ Work for social change and service to the poor

- ◆ Fundraisers such as car washes and bake sales
- ◆ The appearance of the physical facilities
- ◆ The attitudes of greeters, ushers, and members toward visitors
- ◆ Announcements during worship
- ◆ The church's website

And much more. We not only want people to know what is happening in the life of the church, but we also want people to see the church as a warm, welcoming, caring body. In every interaction with the public, we want to convey a warm hospitality so that those who read about our programs, drive past our facilities, and participate with us in clean-up projects will want to become part of the body of Christ.

Mail in the Box and More!

Public relations certainly includes traditional strategies such as brochures, newspaper articles, and letters of welcome to new people in the neighborhood. But those are only a beginning. Use this checklist with your church board, evangelism committee, or hospitality task force as a discussion-starter.

When preparing news releases for the church, write in an inverted pyramid style, starting with a "lead" of no more than 35 words, then sharing the most important facts, and finally providing needed background information.

Use quotes to humanize and add warmth to the story. Avoid wordiness and inside language. Remember that the people and programs may be unknown to most of your audience, so provide the necessary background. Most news releases need to be 500 words or less.

Television Reporting

Don't hesitate to invite a local station to send a reporter and camera to your church when you are celebrating a significant event, offering a service to the community, or starting a unique ministry. Many of us think of inviting newspaper reporters but fail to consider the possible interest of a television station. Television stations have been known to provide coverage for events like:

- ◆ A 50-, 100-, or 200- year anniversary of a church.
- ◆ The launching of a childcare center or preschool program.

- ◆ The opening of a food pantry.
- ◆ The start of a shelter for the homeless.
- ◆ An “Alternative Christmas Gift Fair” that offers peaceful, less expensive gift ideas.
- ◆ A street hockey or skateboard program for community youth.
- ◆ A birthday party for a member who turns 100.
- ◆ A forum on youth needs in the community
- ◆ A seminar on handling personal finances.
- ◆ A neighborhood clean-up day.

A Hospitality Audit

Have a task force do a complete hospitality audit of your church, looking at it from the perspective of a person driving by on the street or visiting for the first time.

Resources

This report has hopefully increased your interest in exploring the further the topics of public relations and hospitality. Feel free to copy this report for use in your church, along with the accompanying checklist.

How Shall They Hear? Is a handbook on religious communication published by the *Religion Communicators Council* (call 214-530-6495)

The following resources are available from New Life Ministries through the address, phone, and website at the bottom of the page.

- ◆ *Public Relations Kit*, a practical guide for your congregation which comes with permission to photocopy.
- ◆ *Practical Strategies for Servant Evangelism*, which will help you reach out through acts of service and kindness.
- ◆ *The First Thirty Seconds: A Guide to Hospitality for Greeters and Ushers*, which is a concise booklet that helps greeters and ushers convey the kind of welcome you want visitors to experience.

To purchase any of these produces, go to our online order form or call us toll-free at 1-800-774-3360.

For online resources, see *Where to Find What: Hospitality and Promotion and Public Relations*.

And remember, you can contact New Life Ministries without cost or obligation to talk about the specific needs of your congregation.

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