

Quintessentials

Top 5 insights for ministry from our team in the field



Catholic Leadership
INSTITUTE

Five Steps to Improve Your Parish Communications

Upon a comprehensive analysis of the *Next Generation Parish* experience underway in over 100 parishes across the country, it is becoming clear in the anecdotal stories and collected data that an area of great opportunity for growth in most parishes - no matter the size or structure - is enhanced communications.

While every parish may have a different set of skills and processes in place, there is a common trend of not placing sufficient emphasis on strategic communications. As a result, the full potential of deliberate messaging often goes unnoticed. This document highlights a core set of recommendations to help your parish move beyond the mere tasks associated with “communication activity” towards a more comprehensive approach for “communication strategy.” With a common understanding around priorities, messaging, channel breakdown, and robust scheduling, a parish can set a solid foundation to better embrace a missionary impulse, which is a key indicator of enhanced vibrancy.

To help your parish on this path toward more effective communication in support of discipleship, Catholic Leadership Institute offers five steps your parish can take to begin approaching parish communications more strategically.

15%

**INCREASE IN THOSE WHO
RECOMMEND
THEIR PARISH**

In the Diocese of Orlando, one cohort of 6 parishes focused on communications and saw a 15% increase in those who would recommend their parish.



“...listening is the first indispensable ingredient of dialogue and good communication.”

– Pope Francis

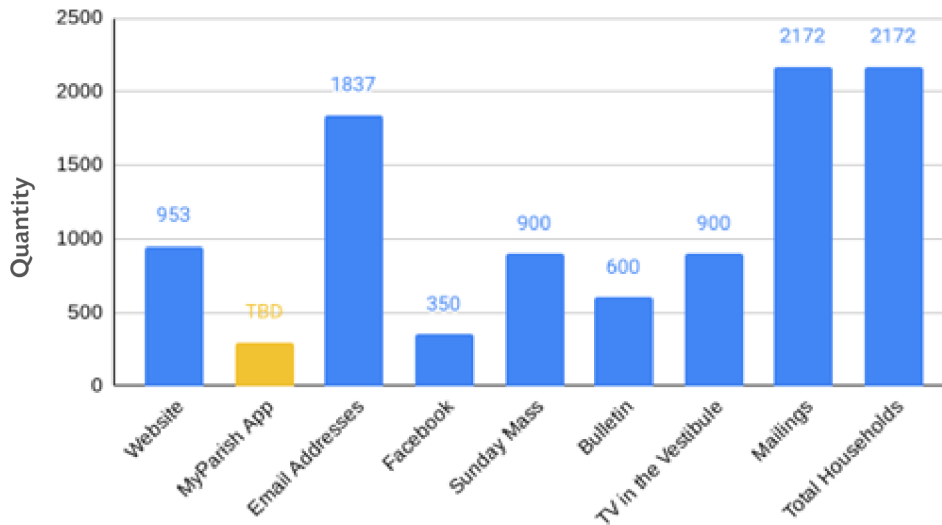
1. Audit Parish Communications

Begin with a thorough assessment of your current communication work. Take the time to understand the breadth of your communications, identify who manages each communication channel, and evaluate how you allocate people and money toward communications. Realizing that each parish is different and has its own unique communication needs, it is a valuable exercise to identify your current communications bandwidth to “take stock” of the resources with which you are currently working.

- Identify all the ways in which you currently communicate. (For example, this may include your bulletin, website, e-newsletters, and/or social media.)**
 - What is the frequency and reach of each communication outlet?

SAMPLE PARISH CHANNEL GRAPH

Graph by KP Consulting



- Review current staff roles and responsibilities as they relate to communications.**
 - How many people do you have on staff that assist with various communication needs?
 - Do you have someone on staff devoted to overseeing your communications, specifically?
 - Which communications are managed by volunteers?
 - Who is the person/people who manage(s) each communication channel?
- Clarify how many people are seeing your material. (For example, a certain percentage of Mass-going parishioners receive bulletins, etc.)**
 - How many bulletins do you print and how many remain each week?
 - How often do you review your e-newsletter analytics available in your Content Management System (i.e. Flocknote), such as open rates and click-through rates?
 - Upon reviewing your social media engagement levels, what posts yield the greatest response?
 - Take account of how effective you are within these channels to understand what draws the highest level of engagement. Are you spending an equivalent amount of time on the items that are yielding the greatest results?



APPENDIX
*Next Generation
Parish
Communications
Assessment*

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

Graph by KP Consulting

Channel	Frequency	Intended Reach	Actual Reach	Responsible Person	Audience
Bulletin	Weekly	600 printed	360 (40% leftovers)	Mary (parish secretary)	Mass goers
Website	Daily	Total page views & Avg. time on page	Identify a reasonable % based on trends	Joseph (web contractor)	General public
eNewsletter	Bi-Weekly	1,837 subscribers	3670 opens (20% open rate), 55 clicks (3% click through rate)	Fr. Emmanuel (pastor)	Registered parishioners
Social media	Daily	350 followers	Avg. 5 likes, 1 share per post	John (youth minister)	Local Catholics

2. Review Your Process

Once you understand the reality of your current communication situation, it is worthwhile to identify whether the process you use for sharing your messages makes sense. Based on your current reality, set an expectation for your parish’s ongoing communication best practices and future needs.

Document current internal communication processes.

- When a parishioner wants to promote something, how is that request shared with the parish office? Do you follow up within a specific period of time with a common set of expectations?
- Is there a set process that all parishioners know to follow? If there is a process, is it documented, practiced, and replicable? If there is no process, could you introduce an online request form?
- To clarify expectations, create a checklist for which communication channels should be used in each scenario, such as promoting regular events, organizing major initiatives, and/or managing unexpected crises.
- Is the current system in place helpful, or should you consider whether new procedures and/or staffing structure would be beneficial to meet the various communication needs of the parish?

Review the findings and set future best practices.

- What is the best way to gather all relevant parish staff and volunteers together to review the discovery findings and evaluate the areas of greatest potential and success?
- Are there new ways to approach your communication processes based upon your staffing model, channel breakdown, and resource allocation to be more efficient with everyone’s time?
- How will you hold yourselves accountable to implement and accomplish your new set of best practices? For example, you could set regular touch points for the communications team to stay informed and aligned. Communications channels can and should be adjusted over time.



COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL MAP TEMPLATE

Graph by KP Consulting

Channel	Time-Sensitive Matter	Special Message from Leadership	Campaigns/Seasonal Engagement	General Announcements
	Emergency	Announcement about the state of the parish, or a new project (Commission Initiatives)	Large, parish and community-wide message series (Parish Mission, Advent/Lent, Plans)	General ministry announcements, sign-ups, events, etc.
Text Message	Text core team	-	-	-
Staff Email/Meeting	Email staff	Preview with core staff	Preview with core staff	-
Ministry Leaders Email	Email ministry team leaders	Announce to ministry heads	Announce to ministry heads	-
Website	Update website - special page	Update website - home page	Banner on home page > to special page	On individual page
Social Media	Post, and link to website	Post, and link to website	Organic + paid posts	Organic posts/invitations
MyParish App	Push notification, link to website	Message, link to website	Regular posts	In appropriate channel/calendar
Flocknote	Flocknote special message	Include in weekly Flocknote	Ongoing writeups in weekly Flocknote	-
YouTube	-	Video preview	Video highlight	-
Bulletin	Recap in bulletin, direct to website	Include in bulletin, direct to website	Weekly coverage	as needed
Direct Mail	-	Postcard drop	Postcard Drop	-
Sunday Mass	Address in homily/announcements	Weekend message (4-6 weeks)	Weekend Message (ongoing)	-
Local Publications	-	-	Regional ads	-
Office of Communication	Engage comm office if appropriate	-	Summary update	-
Press Release	Issue PR if appropriate	-	-	-
Office of Evangelization	-	-	Summary update	-

3. Set Intentional Goals

Every time a communication is sent from your parish a goal should be attached to it. It is important that you understand the purpose of what you are communicating. This creates a way for you to measure effectiveness. The language and method used should be driven by the predetermined goal.

Listen

- Take the time to understand the purpose of each communication being shared.
- What specific objectives are misaligned with the broader parish mission that you could reconsider before beginning content creation?

Clarify the goal.

- What specific metric are you trying to achieve? Such as, number of attendees at an event or participation in a specific activity.
- What additional resources are needed to reach your goal(s)? How best can you acquire those resources?
- How early should you begin sharing information based upon the specific timebound aspect to each particular communication?

Respond to the needs.

- How can you effectively share your message in a way that holds true to the purpose you wish to achieve?
- When are you taking time to gauge success and document it for the future?





4. Know Your Audience

There is a temptation to try communicating everything to everyone through all available channels by default. This can be a futile approach and has the reverse effect desired in capturing attention. By identifying upfront who needs to see each message and using appropriate channels, the communications approach will feel more personal, deliberate, and purposeful, all of which is expected in today's communications ecosystem.

Identify your audience.

- Based on what you know about the communication you are sending, who are you trying to reach?

Consider alternatives.

- What specific demographics or cultures are represented in your community that should be given intentional consideration?

Adapt your approach.

- Based on what you aim to accomplish with your communication, what is the most reasonable approach? For example, if you are trying to welcome back parishioners who are registered but not attending Mass, the bulletin is not the right place to invest your time. If you are looking to engage your seniors, don't post invitations for them to your parish TikTok reel.

5. Develop Clear Messaging

Once you understand exactly who you are speaking to, it helps to create a core set of messaging for your communication pieces that resonates with that audience. A standard set of language and design elements that can help set the tone provides an ongoing resource to reference and will ensure a consistent look, tone, and feel across all necessary ministries.

Clarify your message.

- Build a clear, succinct set of core message points for your communication. For example, if promoting an event, you will always want to include event title, date, time, location, RSVP details, sponsoring ministry, and any other pertinent information.
- Do your messaging priorities align with your parish's charism and mission?

Incorporate your branding.

- Do you have all your logo and brand details (such as fonts and colors) collected into one place? How can you best bring all these branding elements together into one resource for ongoing reference? This could include creating a base set of templates within an online design tool like Canva to assist with a unified look and feel across all ministries.



PRO TIP!

Parishes can set up a free “Pro” account with Canva, an online design tool, which allows you to upload your specific branding elements, including logo files, a set color palette, and font styles which can be automatically applied to your designs.



To improve your communications, it is essential to invest the time to review and adapt your internal processes first. By streamlining the system for receiving and processing information appropriately upfront, you will be more effective with what and how you share information.

Once this is established, you will be more consistent, which will increase the chances of your parish’s message being seen and remembered. Such a recall will help lead to greater success in achieving your ministry goals.

Next Steps

To become more proactive with your communication efforts, consider incorporating these steps to build a comprehensive communications strategy for your parish:

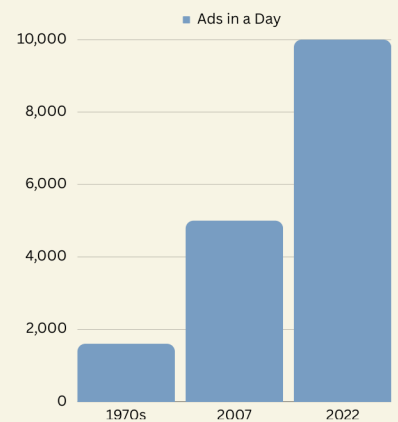
- 1 Host listening sessions and/or focus groups with parish leaders to understand their overall priorities and goals.
- 2 Collect Sacramental data from the parish and/or (arch)diocesan records to understand trends from the past in order to best predict the future realities.
- 3 Organize your findings to identify your top 2-3 strategic communication priorities for the upcoming calendar year.
- 4 Prepare a 12-month schedule to coordinate communication about regularly scheduled events, special initiatives, school enrollment efforts, progress toward goals, and general ministry events.
- 5 Set budgets and benchmarks for growth based on strategic communication priorities, assess measurements for success, and refine processes if/as needed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Back in the 1970s, it was reported that the average person saw between 500 to 1600 ads per day.

In 2007, the market research firm Yankelovich estimated that the average person saw up to 5,000 ads per day.

Digital marketing experts estimate that most Americans in 2022 were exposed to around 6,000 to 10,000 ads each day.



Source: Carr, S. (2021, Feb 15). How Many Ads Do We See A Day In 2022? Lunio. lunio.ai/blog/strategy/how-many-ads-do-we-see-a-day

Note: This Ministry Application was compiled in close collaboration with KP Consulting Group, a robust network of Catholic marketers and strategists, who assist dioceses, parishes, and ministries with creating successful strategies for improved communications.

APPENDIX I NEXT GENERATION PARISH COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT

Next Generation Parish is a 4-year experience offered by Catholic Leadership Institute that helps parishes meet the challenges of our time through models that foster spiritual maturity, share leadership, offer a vibrant Sunday experience, and embrace a missionary impulse.

In order to build deeper connections with those you serve, we begin this 4-year process with a communication channel assessment to help our team provide the appropriate recommendations for you. We want to know which communication channels you use, how many people are reached through each one, and what you may be exploring for the future.

Each parish is different and will have unique communication needs. There are no wrong answers to this survey, only the opportunity to "take stock" of the resources with which we are working.

The image shows a digital survey form titled "Philadelphia: Parish Communication Assessment". The header is blue with a logo of three hands holding a globe. Below the title, there is introductory text explaining the purpose of the assessment. The main body of the form is white and contains four numbered questions, each with a text input field. A legend indicates that questions 1 through 4 are required.

Philadelphia: Parish Communication Assessment

Next Generation Parish is a 4-year experience offered by Catholic Leadership Institute that helps parishes meet the challenges of our time through models that foster spiritual maturity, share leadership, offer a vibrant Sunday experience, and embrace a missionary impulse.

In order to build deeper connections with those you serve, we begin this 4-year process with a communication channel assessment to help our team provide the appropriate recommendations for you. We want to know which communication channels you use, how many people are reached through each one, and what you may be exploring for the future.

Each parish is different and will have unique communication needs. There are no wrong answers to this survey, only the opportunity to "take stock" of the resources with which we are working.

* Required

1. Parish Name *
Enter your answer
2. Parish Website *
Enter your answer
3. Contact Name *
Enter your answer
4. Phone/Email *
Enter your answer

1. Parish Name
2. Parish Website
3. Contact Name
4. Phone/Email
5. I am a: *Pastor, Paid Parish Staff Worker, Volunteer, Other*
6. Which of the following communications channels does your parish typically use? *Parish bulletin, Website, Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, E-newsletter, School emails, Internal network (i.e. Teams, Asana, Monday, or Slack), Parish announcements, Marquee sign, Videos, Direct mail, Flyers/posters, other.*
7. What is the reach of each channel per week? (Please list each one with the number, as shown here: bulletins printed, 800, etc.)
8. Which programs/ministries maintain their own separate communication networks (i.e. ACTS retreats, Knights of Columbus, etc.)
9. What is the greatest strength of your parish communications?
10. What is the greatest area of opportunity for your parish communications?
11. What communications channel(s) are you considering to add in the next 3-6 months that are not listed above, if any?

**APPENDIX II
NEXT GENERATION PARISH
PARISH RESOURCE ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**



SOLUTION A



SOLUTION B



SOLUTION C

Next Generation Parish - Communication Planning Options			
	Solution A	Solution B	Solution C
Staffing Model / Channel / Resources	Parish with core channels/processes.	Parish with growing / emerging resources.	Parish with flourishing resources and flexibility.
Staffing Model			
Pastor / Pastoral Associate	x	x	x
Parish Admin Asst.	x	x	x
Professional Ministry Staff			x
Ministry Heads		x	x
Communication Channel			
<i>In-Person</i>			
Weekend Masses	x	x	x
Homily	x	x	x
Announcements		x	x
Reflection from a Lay Leader at Mass			x
Agenda for Team Meeting			x
<i>Digital - Internal</i>			
Email to Ministry Leaders	x	x	x
Slack, Teams, etc.			x
<i>Digital - External</i>			
Website - Homepage	x	x	x
Website - Designated Page		x	x
Website - Designated Section			x
eBlast - All Parish	x	x	x
eBlast - Ministry Groups			x
YouTube Special Video		x	x
MyParish App			x
Social Media - Facebook	x	x	x
Social Media - Instagram		x	x
Social Media - TikTok			x
<i>Print - External</i>			
Bulletin - Print Edition	x	x	x
Bulletin - Special Insert		x	x
Posters for Vestibule / Campus	x	x	x
Postcard to all Families			x
Mailed letter from the Pastor	x	x	x
Other Key Stakeholders			
Community Partners / Donors	x	x	x
Local Diocesan Office of Evangelization		x	x
Local Diocesan Office of Comm. and Planning			x