



The Diocese of Virginia

Church Toolbox
Tools to Build and Grow Your Church



Volume 2, Issue 1 **Annual Council Edition**

www.churchtoolbox.org

January 2004

Church Toolbox is a free resource for the wider church sponsored by the Diocese of Virginia Commission on Congregational Development. Please feel free to use any of these articles for discussion at Vestry meetings, church newsletters, or any other purpose. We ask that you credit the author and reference our website.

Improving the Signs in and Around Your Church

Introduction

The day I arrived to interview at the church where I currently am the priest, I was armed with a handy software program that pinpointed exactly where the church would be. As I turned left at an intersection, I knew the church would be on my right hand side. I turned, and the church wasn't there! I doubled back, tried again and once again could not locate the church. On the third try, I just managed to catch a small, black sign with letters about one inch high. As priest, one of the first things I did was to get the parish to re-think the signs they had out front. Given the size of the physical plant, which was large, and the speed of the traffic passing the church, we chose a large, highly visible sign to replace the old one.

Here are some things to consider.

Pretend That You Have Just Arrived in Town

It may be helpful to take a group in your parish and physically walk around the outside of the building. How fast is the traffic moving? The original sign my church had would have worked well on a city street where people walked or drove slowly. However, if cars are traveling 40-50 m.p.h., the letters on the sign need to be big enough to be seen at that rate of speed. Are the signs hidden by branches of trees? How are the sight angles as people approach the church? Are your current signs in good condition or are they in need of maintenance, conveying a subtle negative message to newcomers? Many churches have main entrances in one place and parking lots that are in a

different place altogether, such as in the back of the building or across the street. Do the signs get people where you want them to go? Episcopal churches may want to consider posting "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" signs, as well as new signs that state, "Member of the Worldwide Anglican Communion"

Think About What You Want to Achieve

There are a wide variety of options in choosing signs. Think carefully about the experience people will have as they view your signs. For outside signs, it is beneficial to test out the best location. Be certain the signs
Continued on page 2

Percept Tools for Congregational and Ministry Development

Percept is a company the Diocese of Virginia has contracted with to provide demographic and ethnographic information to aid congregations in understanding their ministry context better. Percept provides basic tools that are helpful to a group or a congregation to better discern the needs of the community and to help develop a plan of action to respond to those needs. Congregations of the diocese may access this information and tools through accessing this web site: www.link2lead.com.

First View: A six page report of demographic and ethnographic information within a three mile radius of your physical church location. This report

provides population growth, ethnic presence, generational information as well as income, education and community concerns. It is free to congregations that fall within the coverage area of the Percept study done for the Diocese.

M.A.P.: The Ministry Area Profile provides abundant demographics, religious preferences, and community concerns of a specifically designated study area. It provides a tool for new church plant strategy and for existing congregations to gain insight into their particular ministry area. The cost is \$150.00.

ReVision: This tool will help your

congregation answer the question, "Are we a church for ourselves, or are we a church for this community?" Using exhaustive demographic and ethnographic information and a congregational survey it seeks to provide a comparative conversation between congregation and community. The cost is \$570, plus 95 cents for each survey.

The Rev. Tony Pompa
Visit www.churchtoolbox.org
for complete article.

will be *visible* and *legible*. Also, consider what information you want on your signs. Service times and the church phone number are important. If you have a website with a good domain name, including that might direct people to find you on the web. Another issue is whether or not you would like single-sided or double-sided signs. If you have a series of signs, you might choose a logo or color scheme to increase visibility. You may want to light your signs at night.

Signs That Change

Churches that do not demonstrate to the community that they are alive soon become perceived as being “dead”. One way to show change is with signs that change. Moveable letters are one way to advertise important events or convey a message to the community. You could experiment with banners or temporary signs. Our church invented a sign that allowed for cheap, banner-like signs to be placed upon it.

Inside the Church

Keep in mind that many people experience some degree of anxiety in their first visit to a church. Posting clear, visible signs will give them more confidence and allow them to feel at home in your church.

Trust the Professionals

If your church spends \$3,000 on a sign, and it reaches just two or three families that become members of your church, the sign pays for itself in one year.

The Rev. David Keill

Visit www.churchtoolbox.org for complete article.

Starting Youth Programs Within the Church

How do we start a youth group? Or, how do we teach our youth the importance of their lay leadership within the congregation? What loaded questions! Obviously, there is not a quick and easy answer for this huge and vital mission, but there are certainly some important points to be aware of and hopefully some helpful tools to share along the way.

Question #1 Are the youth in your church integrated into the weekly worship and various lay opportunities?

Acolyte Program
Choir
Potential Vestry Members
Youth Lay Readers
Youth Ushers
Youth Liaisons to various committees (Christian Education, Outreach)

Question #2 Do the youth have at least one designated adult (either a lay person or a staff person) who is specifically designated by the Rector and committed to being a mentor, coordinator of youth activities and events, and a listening ear?

Whether a lay person or a hired staff person (lay or clergy), a successful youth program must have someone willing to devote time and energy to organizing fellowship and teaching time as well opportunities for service for the youth. Someone who is willing to share God’s love and the message of the Gospel with the youth of

the church is obviously vital. **Who** this person is can be just as important if not more important than **what** he or she helps the youth organize. There is not one perfect type of personality for a successful youth worker, but a genuine and sincere interest in youth is an obvious must.

Question #3 Do the youth of your church have a designated and consistent time to gather as a group?

Whether there are 2 youth nervously walking through the doors of the church or 200 youth knocking down the door, having a consistent meeting time and place is pivotal in forming group cohesiveness.

Question #4 What do I do with them once they come????

There must be a “method to our madness”! The person and/or team responsible for the youth needs to come up with a general mission for spreading the Gospel with the youth. What works for one church might not work for another, but the elements of fellowship, teaching, worship, and outreach seem to be consistent.

Question #5 How important is student leadership?

HUGE!!!!!!!!!!

Within reason, kids need to own what they are planning if it is going to be a success.

Question #6 How do the design-

nated youth leader and leadership team communicate with one another and the church?

Some suggestions:

Phone calls inviting kids to youth group

Announcements in bulletins or parish reports

Flyers in the mail

If possible, email is “in”, and a great way to send out last minute announcements!

Pictures in common places so that the church as a whole can know what’s going on and spread the word.

Question #7 Once you’re on a roll, how do you keep them coming back?

It’s easy to think that if something was a success one year, it should become a tradition for the next 20! This is sometimes true but might not always be the case! Keeping things fresh and exciting so that the kids can’t wait to come back might change as you grow, but the fundamental basics are just as true with 200 kids as they are with 2 kids. Creating a safe place to share the love of God and having an opportunity to explore the meaning of faith with friends and people who care is a priceless gem and an opportunity for a foundation that is invaluable.

Lisa Navarra

St. John’s Church, McLean, VA

Visit www.churchtoolbox.org for complete article.