

# Effective Communication: A Guide for Congregations

## Radio Ministries

Your local congregation follows in a long tradition of storytellers. The gospel story takes on countless forms and transforms lives. Radio is an exciting medium for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, providing a ministry for your community.

There are thousands of radio stations in the United States - broadcast, Internet and satellite - heard by hundreds of millions of listeners, yet radio is a specialized, personal and relatively inexpensive communication tool. Radio stations offer specialized formats to attract certain types of listeners. Since each format is aimed at a particular type of listener, if you know whom you want to reach, you can get excellent exposure on a carefully selected radio program or station.

Can radio serve the interests and goals of your congregation? Don't make the decision alone. Gather several members of your congregation to discuss possibilities. Pray about the direction God is leading you.

### What radio can do for your congregation

Radio can put you in contact with people you might never reach otherwise. It can offer the faith stories of congregation members to the broader community and bring words of acceptance and hope to people who need them.

Radio can extend your congregation's invitation to the entire community: for worship, fellowship, nurture and evangelism. Radio spots can let people know that your congregation cares about them by sharing the faith stories of others and being inviting.

Broadcasts can enrich the spiritual life of your community by engaging listeners in moments of devotion and reflection. Possibilities include: an edited version of the worship service, devotions, interviews with music and Scripture, a discussion of current events or life issues from a faith perspective.

The popularity of evening talk radio indicates many people listen to radio late at night. In addition to people working, there are people who cannot sleep and people whose loneliness is most painful at night. Your congregation can offer them messages of acceptance and hope. A nighttime broadcast

could feature a counseling "hot line" or provide referrals to community service agencies.

### Getting started in radio

#### Determine your purpose

An effective radio ministry requires careful planning. Your purpose must be clear from the very beginning. Develop a purpose statement - a simple sentence that states exactly what you want your listeners to gain from your message or program. For example: "Our program will encourage listeners to take some quiet time each day for personal devotion and suggest ways to use their devotion times."

A purpose statement will focus your message and help you decide what to include in your production. A concise statement of purpose will help clarify your work and excite your congregation; people are more likely to support a project with a clear vision.

#### Determine your resources

To have an effective radio ministry can be as simple as sponsoring a local broadcast of the ELCA's radio ministry, "Grace Matters," including a "local tag" at the end of the recording, or placing an ELCA-produced Public Service Announcement (PSA). Or, you may decide to produce a program of your own.

Do you or others in your congregation have radio or broadcast experience? Are there broadcasting professionals in your community who might consult with you? Your radio project may be a way to involve a person who has been on the fringes of your congregation.

#### Define your audience

List the characteristics of your target audience: likes and dislikes, sources of information, favorite radio stations. Determine their hobbies and interests, priorities and goals. Knowing these characteristics will help you plan your radio program. Talk with several people who represent your target audience. Check your assumptions, and change your profile lists accordingly.

#### Audience response

Once you have established your purpose, assessed your available resources and defined your audience, you are ready to start anticipating the response. Be very clear about what action you want

from your audience. If, for example, you want them to have a better self image because of a renewed belief in God, don't necessarily expect them to come to church. If increased worship audience is your goal, make sure you have developed your plans with that clearly stated.

## **Writing for radio**

Listen critically to radio commercials. Which ones are most effective? Which do you like the best? Why? Have someone else read your copy aloud. If they stumble over your words, revise the sentence. Write for the ear, not for the eye. Write conversationally. Avoid adjectives. Use strong action verbs. Make each word count. Imagine that you are talking to a member of your target audience. Don't insult or talk down to them. (They can turn the dial at any time!) Be personal. Avoid institutional jargon. Be open to suggestions and be willing to rewrite. Good writing is a joy to read and hear.

## **Production and Placement**

Production is the act of putting everything on tape for broadcast. You may be able to produce your project: by yourself, with a sound/radio enthusiast in your congregation, at the radio station or through an ad agency. Many congregations now have their own sound booths. If your congregation plans to do a lot of radio work, has trained people and an adequate budget, you might consider purchasing your own equipment. Some sound enthusiasts have small production facilities in their homes. Your congregation or one nearby may have one of these people in the congregation who might help you with your project. They can offer production expertise as well as a production facility.

Every radio station has production studios, and most will do a limited amount of production for you. While stations are eager to satisfy their customers, they cannot give you the careful attention you may desire. Also, small stations may not be able to do complex productions. Talk to your contact at the station and find out what they can do for you.

Ad agencies create and place messages for their clients. If you have connections, you may be able to get some help at a reduced rate or gratis, but be prepared to pay for the work of an ad agency.

## **Placing your project**

Choose a station your target audience listens to. Don't expect them to change stations in order to hear your message.

Once you've identified the station(s) you want to use, visit them and meet the sales manager, program director or general manager. Listen to the station and try to make your message fit their "sound."

Some stations avoid religious programming. While they may allow you to air a sixty-second PSA, you may not be able to place a full-length program in their schedule. Don't take their rejection personally. Listen to their reasoning and find out what they would be interested in. Show them how you intend to promote your program and try to convince them there is an interested audience.

## **Promotion is crucial**

Simply producing a radio program or message is not enough. It takes constant promotion to remind people to listen. Both external and internal promotion are vital to the success of your project. Be sure to ask the radio station contact how they will promote your broadcast.

Put together your own promotion campaign. Make sure your congregation knows about the radio project and takes pride in it. A billboard or newspaper ad will also remind those outside the congregation to listen.

## **Radio is affordable**

Media price comparisons are made on the basis of the cost of a one-minute spot and how many people will hear the spot. The cost of radio time varies with the number of listeners. Stations with powerful signals in urban areas will charge more for their air time. The size of a radio audience changes over the course of a day. Radio time is more expensive during morning and afternoon rush hours. Evening and overnight time slots are the least expensive. A one-minute radio spot can be less than a dollar in small communities during low listening hours, but can be more than a thousand dollars in major metropolitan areas during the lucrative "drive time" slots. A leading radio station in a medium sized market might charge \$250 for its most expensive sixty-second spot. Check prices with the sales manager of the station.

