How to… create a parish magazine

Tips for editors

Editing a consistent, clear and engaging parish magazine is a challenging job and sometimes a thankless one for hard pressed magazine editors. However your parish magazine has a vital role to play in the life of your community. Your magazine will probably reach more people in your community than any other form of communication your church produces, so it is a fantastic outreach tool. This is why your magazine should always be a top priority. To support you with this essential task we have produced some top tips to help you make your magazine even better.

Style
Clear text makes your magazine easier to read and can help make it more accessible to those with limited eyesight.

- Limit your word count to no more than 300 words per A5 page
- Use a font size of 12 or larger
- Avoid underlining as this can confuse people with limited eyesight
- Avoid using brightly coloured paper as it reduces the contrast between the paper, making it harder to read
- Avoid block capitals as they are harder to read
- Break down lists into bullet points
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short and concise
- Use good quality, clear images. Photographs, even in black and white are preferable to clip art
- Try to break up dense sections of text by using boxes, columns etc.
- Don’t be afraid of white spaces – they can make text less oppressive
- Your magazine is an outreach tool and should engage non church-goers as well as your congregations, so use simple English without church jargon
- Always use people’s full names to avoid confusion for those who do not attend your church regularly

Planning
A carefully planned and consistent layout can help to make your magazine more attractive.

- Use an eye-catching image on the cover
- Include a contents page at the front of the magazine to make it more user-friendly. Keep your contents consistent so that people know where to look for specific information
- Every magazine should have a message from a member of clergy
- List service times including special services i.e. Christingle Services, Remembrance Day Service etc
- Think about having a theme for each edition, to help promote specific messages/special events
- Put your most interesting stories towards the front of the magazine as they will engage your readers more quickly
- Dedicate at least a page to advertising your church’s events as the magazine is a great promotional tool
- The editor has the right to edit, so don’t be afraid to cut text, or to tell people that their submission is not suitable
- It is always better to include less information than to overwhelm readers with excessive detail
- Have consistent deadlines and make sure they are published in every edition of the magazine
Your church identity
Being consistent in the image you present to your parish can help to put you at the heart of the community. Think about how you can make your church a household name.

- If you have a logo, make sure you use it in a prominent position. It will make your publications instantly recognisable and will help to promote your church in the community.
- Think about whether your parish vision is communicated through the magazine.
- Consider your parish’s community and whether the articles you are publishing will be interesting to them i.e. articles for young families, elderly people, teenagers etc.
- Always use people’s full names to avoid confusion. Magazines should be accessible for everyone, not just regular church-goers.
- Make sure you include clergy contact details and other useful telephone numbers i.e. church wardens, readers, magazine team information.
- Include details of how the reader can get further information on each story.

Advertising
Selling adverts can raise funds which can be used to improve your magazine’s quality i.e. upgrading to colour or to glossy paper.

- Make sure adverts are clearly distinguishable from the text and that they do not look as though the magazine is endorsing the product or service.
- Try to keep advertising in blocks to avoid distracting the reader from the articles.
- Ensure you include your contact details so advertisers can discuss their requirements with you.
- Remember to create professional looking advertisements for your own parish events and activities. Don’t let your in house adverts make less of an impact than those of external advertisers.
- Set clear deadlines for advertising copy and publicise them in the magazine to help companies and organisations to plan their communications.
- Don’t forget to keep talking to companies about advertising opportunities and reminding them that you are available.

Additional resources
The Association for Church Editors’ Web Site provides advice on improving writing and visual impact of church publications: www.churcheditors.org
Parish Pump includes illustrations, humour, puzzles and articles: www.parishpump.co.uk
Get your church noticed gives 1,000 ways to help your church stand out and includes excellent advice on parish magazine writing: www.getyourchurchnoticed.com
CartoonChurch provides cartoons, comedy and resources for use in parish magazines (a small charge applies): www.cartoonchurch.com

Training
The Church of England offers communication training courses for all aspects of church communication. To find out more, visit www.commstraining.cofe.anglican.org/2010/flc.php