



RENEWING  
Ministry

# Communicating within a MMA

First steps to effective internal communications



Diocese  
of Derby



Prepared by the Diocese of Derby  
Communications Office

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## 1. Introduction

In a Christian setting, sharing knowledge for the benefit of the whole organisation could be described as a 'ministry' - an outward expression of inner discipleship, putting others before self.

**The importance of good communication by Christians within and beyond church structures cannot be underestimated**

Information and knowledge could help individuals or groups grow in their discipleship and indeed, sharing the good news of the Gospel is a universal Christian calling. Good communication, however,

requires an investment of time, money and energy. Bad communication wastes time, money and energy. The importance of good communication by Christians within and beyond church structures therefore cannot be underestimated.

- This 'Toolkit' document is the first of a two-part instalment which aims to offer some suggestions about how to set up an effective communications system within an MMA.
- It addresses the issues of internal communication - that which occurs between Christians within the MMA.
- It assumes no previous experience of organising internal communications, so much of it may be obvious to you. Take from it what you need and adapt it to suit your needs.

Advice on external communication planning and techniques will be addressed in another Toolkit document later this year.

## 2. Useful resources for getting started

The Diocese of Derby has a Communications Officer (DCO) as a point of contact to advise on communications problems and challenges. Once an MMA is launched and an Area Vicar appointed, he or she is welcome to contact the DCO to discuss the aims and needs of the MMA and work up a communications plan to support it or comment on any plan you may have already prepared. Contact details are:

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Ruth Green works part-time and can be contacted on the above number from 9am-5pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, and 1pm-4.30pm on Thursdays. The Communications Secretary, Vivien Alexander is also available during these and other days during normal office hours, but the Communications Office is not staffed on Wednesdays.

## 3. First steps

It is important to ensure internal communication systems are in place first so that when the time comes to communicate with the outside world, there are people, I.T. and other resource options in place in order to get tasks done.

The first step in sorting this out is to draw up a simple internal communications plan. It would be prudent for the Area Vicar to do this, in consultation with his/her colleagues. The plan might follow these steps:-

### Step by step communications plan

- Outline what the overall vision of the MMA is and any priorities the MMA may have for the coming year so any communications plans are in context.
- Outline what your communications aims are - in your first year, what kind of information needs to be circulated across the MMA and why? It may be to ensure every church member in the MMA has seen the vision statement, or understands the reason for Renewing Ministry, or attends special events that you may plan to help churches get to know one another, or understands how they fit into the bigger picture of an MMA, or, an aim may be to set up a database of contacts within the MMA. Reasons for communicating these things will be specific to your MMA - you may wish to encourage, inform, or generate action/activity of some kind.
- Decide if any budget will be required for MMA communications - take into account production of leaflets, posters, or other material that will help you achieve your communications aims. It may be possible to share resources, such as photocopiers, computers or even people.
- Decide who your 'audiences' within the MMA will be - there may be groups of people you wish to communicate with, such as youth teams, or Readers. Some groups may need targeted information.

**draw up a simple internal communications plan**

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- v. Decide who the messages for your communication should come from - it helps to have a person or group (e.g. a committee) to attribute messages to, as people then understand the position and authority of the communicator within the whole system.
- vi. Define what messages you wish to communicate. These can take some time to formulate as they must be clear and simple. If necessary the DCO can assist with this.
- vii. If possible, identify people who can help you deliver the communications plan (see next section on co-ordination and delegation).
- viii. Choose the appropriate media for your messages, i.e. posters, leaflets, web sites, newsletters, meetings or events. A list of commonly used media is in section 5.
- ix. Execute the plan.
- x. Measure the results. If possible, try to get an idea of how your communications are getting through. This can be by simply talking to people, doing formal questionnaires, or collecting opinions via group meetings.

## 4. The importance of co-ordination and delegation

One of the main stumbling blocks in achieving well-managed communication is that in any given system, there is either no one, or too many people trying to communicate. This results in either a total vacuum of information, or a plethora of messages that can be conveyed in numerous different ways, or even duplicated unnecessarily. The end results of both these scenarios are undesirable, and often have negative outcomes of understanding and feelings within the whole group or system, wasting time, money and energy.

One solution to this is to recruit a communications co-ordinator who can work for the benefit of the

whole group and on whom the responsibility for good communication rests. In MMAs this may be the Area Vicar initially, but long term, it is desirable to have a lay person at least assisting in this area. The DCO recommends all MMAs try to recruit a communications co-ordinator by the time the MMA launches or soon after.

In a Church situation, recruiting volunteers for any task can be a challenge. But the time commitment need not be too onerous.

### ii) Desirable profile of a communications co-ordinator

It would be helpful if the chosen person possessed some of the following skills:

- Organisational skills
- Ability to attend MMA-related meetings
- Ability to listen, assimilate and summarise information
- Ability to write clearly and concisely
- Ability to direct others with humility
- Ability to see the 'bigger picture'
- Ability to work in teams

### iii) What could a communications co-ordinator do?

The extent of the role of a Communications co-ordinator may vary from one MMA to another but here are some suggested areas that this person might get involved with:

- To define with the MMA leadership what the extent of their role will be and for how long.
- To recruit a small team of people from within the MMA to help support them in executing the communications plan (see section 5 for what kind of tools they may need to use and therefore the skills they may need to employ).
  - To attend MMA meetings.
  - To listen to the main points of meetings and summarise them.
  - To direct their support team to disseminate information as appropriate.
  - To keep in touch with the Diocesan Communications Officer for exchange of relevant information and for training/support if necessary.

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## 5. Some examples of communications tools

Many churches have the following tools already in place for their parish communications, but it is worth outlining the main examples here as many of them could be set up or adjusted to help deliver the MMA internal communications plan:-

### Newsletters and parish magazines

Many churches have their own. Perhaps a database of each editor can be compiled and MMA news and information distributed for reproduction in magazines locally

### Web sites

Again, many churches/parishes already have these. Perhaps a simple MMA site could be set up to which each parish site could link. This will also be seen by external audiences, but aimed at internal ones. This should not matter, providing you make it clear on the site who it is intended for and provide a place where external visitors can look for information more relevant to them.

### Leaflets

Some MMAs have already developed bespoke leaflets for keeping churches informed about the progress of the Renewing Ministry project. Leaflets, which can be copied locally, are often a very effective means of reaching many church people.

### Posters

These can advertise events, courses or initiatives. They should be simple designs for getting initial attention and encouraging the reader to obtain more information from a specified source.

### E-mail

Although not all people have e-mail, the numbers converting to electronic forms of communications is growing daily. NB: When collecting e-mail addresses for the purposes of distributing information, there are laws governing the way that data is stored and used. If you are not aware of data protection laws, it is important you contact the DCO for advice.

### Events

You may wish to introduce churches to one another and address them en masse through an event. The launch of the MMA may be an opportunity to do this via a launch 'party', conference, or special service, at which you can distribute more information about the vision and aims of the MMA and provide details of how people can find out more and get involved.

### Church Noticeboards

Important for both church members and visitors from outside the church.

### Directories and databases

These make it easier for people to contact and get to know one another throughout the MMA. The vision and aims of the MMA can be repeated in these places.

## Diocesan communications channels

The Diocesan Communications office is keen to enable sharing of ideas and possibly resources across the diocese between MMAs. One of the DCO's communications aims is to generate a greater sense of a diocesan community, encouraging and informing one another. There are various channels for enabling this:

- The diocesan web site: [www.derby.anglican.org](http://www.derby.anglican.org), especially the Renewing Ministry pages accessible from the Home Page.
- Our Diocese, especially page 2 which outlines church news and events across the county.
- Clergy Noticeboard & Mailing.
- Contacts with ecumenical publications and web sites, such as the Derby Church Network Magazine in Derby City.

Please keep the DCO informed about news, initiatives and success stories in MMAs.

## 6. Training

At the national Church of England offices in London, there is a communications training unit which offers a number of excellent courses on topics from newsletter production to PowerPoint presentations. Contact the DCO for a brochure, or visit [www.commstraining.cofe.anglican.org](http://www.commstraining.cofe.anglican.org) for a full list of courses.

Of particular interest might be 'Creating a User-Friendly Church', a one day course planned for November 2005, which offers guidance to consider how well your church is communicating with its congregation and with those you want to reach. It covers areas such as church notice boards, parish magazines, disabled access, signage, web sites, basic media relations and appointing a parish press officer. See further details on the web site.

The dioceses of Leicester, Southwell and Peterborough offer some communications training more locally. Details can be obtained from the Derby communications office, or from the Clergy Noticeboard 'Conferences & Courses' section.

The Diocese of Derby communications office does not yet offer formal training, but we hope to introduce some basic courses through the Council for Developing Discipleship & Ministry later this year and build on the number on offer over time. The DCO is on hand, however, for advice and support.

### Acknowledgement:

Some of the advice in this Toolkit was taken from 'An Introduction to Church Communication' by Richard Thomas. It is now out of print but can be borrowed from the Church House library in the Board of Education Office.