



Outreach Ideas
English District
Evangelism Team
Newsletter

November 2023

Utilizing our Local Newspapers

Is there any reason to still try and engage our community through the local newspaper? The decline of print newspapers, as the primary source from which people are informed of national stories and international events, has been well-documented for over a decade. Nevertheless, there is one statistic that may be overlooked.

According to the [2023 Local Newspaper Study](#), conducted by America's Newspapers, "218 million Americans access news and information from their local newspapers every month." Why is this the case?



An editorial in the [The Covington News](#), Newton County, Georgia points out what makes your local newspaper unique. "The Information Age has changed the way many people get their news, but local newspapers continue to serve as valuable resources for readers interested in learning more about and becoming more involved in their communities." They go on to note, "Local newspapers often showcase community events like carnivals, local theater productions and projects like park cleanups. These are great ways for readers to become more active in their communities and build stronger communities as a result." Here's why local newspapers can also be a real blessing for a congregation when it comes to extending its outreach, getting the word out about services and events, and sharing Christ with the community.

As one editorial noted, "Although the format or device readers use to connect with their local newspaper might vary, it's clear that newspapers are relied on as the source for local news. A recent national study conducted by the independent research firm Coda Ventures, shows that 79% of Americans use local newspapers to stay informed about their communities and depend on them to feel connected and to decide where they stand on local issues and to find places and things to do." [The Meridian Star](#), October 7, 2023.

Regrettably, not all newspapers are as open to church news. Newspaper advertising in a larger metropolitan area can also be prohibitively expensive. You will know what works best in your corner of the vineyard. Thankfully, there are still many local newspapers that are eager to include local news and events and *want* to hear from organizations like your congregation. In those places, news releases and photographs of events in our congregations are often received with gratitude. Check out whether your community has such a paper.

Newspapers have been eclipsed by the internet and social media as the primary source of news for most people. However, as long as community newspapers continue to exist, they provide another unique means of reaching out to our neighbors and letting them know the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and where they can hear this message proclaimed – your church.

Getting Your Congregation and the Gospel into Your Local Paper



One reason that outreach using the newspaper may not be popular is that display ads are not cheap. However, there are times of the year when, if your congregation's budget permits, you may wish to prepare such advertising. A display ad at Christmas and Easter can be particularly effective.

A quarter page ad, while expensive in a city newspaper, is often not that expensive in a local paper. In addition, ads purchased for the printed paper may also appear in their online edition.

If you are preparing a seasonal advertisement for your congregation you may wish to have a look at the [media kits](#) provided by our Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

You can also purchase print products for newspaper advertising from groups such as [Church Art Online](#). The artwork purchased comes with permission to use it in newspaper advertising. However, before you spend any money on artwork, check to see what materials are already available through your local paper. The advertising department often can help you create your ad using the stock illustrations it has on hand.

Consider writing a news release for events at your church. This is different than Media Advisory. A Media Advisory provides bullet point answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and why. Instead, take the time to write your release as news coverage and as you would like to see it written. In many cases, as a deadline looms, it may often be printed as submitted and without changes. Always provide your congregation's full name, address and phone number in the copy of the news release itself. Be sure to provide your own name and cell phone number for follow-up information in case a reporter or editor would like to contact you.

Once the event at your church has taken place, be sure to follow it up with another news release after the event in which you let the community know what took place. By taking the moment to do the extra work of preparing the text yourself your report is much more likely to retain the correct focus of what your event was all about. While a reporter may see the results of a food drive as "giving back to the community," you can reclaim the focus of "thankfulness to Christ for all of His blessings."

Offer to write a guest column for your newspaper. This is especially welcome when events such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and other holidays come up on the calendar.

Your local paper may have a guest column for local congregations and clergy. Here's something that's too

good to pass up. Make it known that you can also supply an additional column if someone cancels at the last moment. You will be surprised how often this offer is received with great appreciation. This means that the community section editor does not have to scramble at the last moment to fill that unexpected space.

Take phone calls, and return messages right away, when local columnists are looking for comments on seasonal articles and activities. In many cases they want only a short quote to round out an article but it gets your congregation noticed. Reporters also discover that you're readily available and will call upon you more often.

You can even include your QR code in your advertising to draw readers to your website. (See the October edition of your Evangelism Team Newsletter.)



From The Field

Our Pastors and Congregations

The reception from local newspapers can vary widely just as the circumstances under which we serve differs across God's vineyard. What works well in some places may not work well in others.

As Pastor David Miller, of the Lutheran Church of the Ascension in Atlanta, Georgia observed, "In Atlanta, it seems like people are so busy that they're probably not really paying attention to the local paper." In their situation the money for ads is allocated wisely using other means of outreach with more effective results.

In other communities, the reception is quite different. Pastor Daniel Greg, of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in Elk Grove Village, Illinois shares, "Believe it or not; the research shows that the number one way residents of Elk Grove Village, IL choose to get their news is the newspaper.... Not their cellphone or even the TV! So, when The Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit has an event or special service, we usually send an ad or short news story to the newspaper for publishing."



Pastor Seth Hoepfner shares, "Our local newspaper has a pastor's column and I write a column twice a year. When our church or school has a special event, we will write an article to let it be made known."



When Pastor Eric Carlson, of St. John's Lutheran Church and School in Hannibal, Missouri, won the NLSA School Good Shepherd award, the congregation contacted the newspaper and they wrote an article on-line and in print. They did this "to bring awareness of our church and school to our community. We want as many as possible to come for an excellent education and to be taught God's Word. We also support and participate in community festivals. At the FolkLife festival, we have a booth that sells homemade cheese soup. We get face-to-face outreach, but also get listed in the local newspaper and magazine as a vendor. We won best of show two years in a row, which gets us further mention in the papers. It is all with the aim of having the opportunity to share the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus."

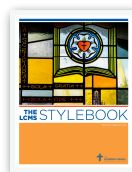
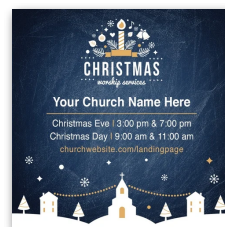
Toolbox

Ideas, Suggestions and Handy Bits

Unless your church ad in the classified section is free (and some local papers provide this as a service to area congregations) you are paying too much. Ads in this section are often small, bring in little revenue for the paper, and are treated as such by the newspaper's advertising department. Consider, instead, providing regular updates for the community page and news releases. They are free and they're much more likely to be noticed and read. The addition of a picture, with smiling faces, also draws reader attention.

Milestone events, anniversaries, installations, special seasonal services and activities are all topics that local papers are happy to share with the community. Articles with faces of local people sell newspapers. If your newspaper has a religious section you can be sure they are looking for submissions.

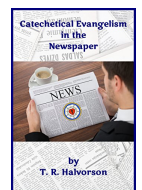
Check out also the seasonal media kits from our LCMS. The items in these kits may be personalized with the local parish's information. They include newspaper ready ads in color as well as black and white. They also include graphics (which can be used on your website), postcards, Facebook advertising and materials for social media.



Check out the graphic kits from Concordia Publishing House's Concordia Technology Solutions for Advent, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Lent, Holy Week. Some of these kits include calendar templates, website banners, Facebook profile images and cover art, photos for Twitter, posts for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, email headers, and copy for bulletin inserts. All of these are easily adaptable for newspaper use as well.

Our own LCMS also provides its own very succinct and free stylebook.

LCMS attorney and author T. R. Halvorson has a book titled, "Catechetical Evangelism in the Newspaper." The book's jacket notes, "Evangelism springs from Luther's Small Catechism into the newspaper. This book shares from the author's experiences in writing religion articles published in his local newspaper. It presents ideas about the Catechism and evangelism, and about newspaper evangelism. It explains an approach to writing catechetical newspaper articles and includes three dozen of the author's published articles as examples of the approach." It's available through Amazon and other online bookstores. You can also read it on Kindle.



Our Synod and District Programs

Materials and Workshops Available For You
(Have a workshop scheduled? Let us know.)



Witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses

Many people are familiar with the Jehovah's Witnesses because of their active evangelism efforts. In addition to going door-to-door, Jehovah's Witnesses are increasing their presence in public spaces with their printed materials. Rather than hide from the Jehovah's Witnesses who come to our front doors, ignore those who man literature racks in public, or avoid conversations about religion with those who work alongside us in the workplace, our interactions with Jehovah's Witnesses are opportunities to bring the Good News to people oppressed by the burdens of the Law and false teachings about Jesus.

In this [module](#), you will learn how to share the salvation that we have in Christ alone with those that are deceived by the teachings of the Watch Tower Society.

If you haven't completed the core module, a self-study version is available on the [Every One His Witness](#) website. Use access code "E1HWFREE" to register.

Previous Topics

- [Outstanding In Your Field](#)
- [Fall Festivals, Street Fairs and Parades](#)
- [Outreach to Our Military](#)
- [The Importance of a Website \(Part 1\)](#)
- [The Importance of a Website \(Part 2\)](#)

Coming Topics

- Inviting Traveling Teams
- Podcasting, Easy and Cheap
- Lawn Displays and Signs ... and more

Next Issue

- Reaching Out in Different Languages

Are you reaching out to a different language group in your area? Let us hear about it.

Articles, Books and Research

Current Research and Writings



Uber Evangelism: Three Lessons

Author Thom S. Rainer shares his experience with The Hope Initiative: Reinvigorating yourself and your church for the task of evangelism. It focuses on praying, studying and going. You can read it [here](#). Cheers to Rev. Fred Reaman for passing it along.



Greg Watson points out in an [article for America's Newspapers](#), "Today's 'typical' newspaper reader is anything but typical." Check out their findings in the [2023 Local Newspaper Study](#).

Please Contact

[Pastor David Tannahill](#)
of our Evangelism Team
with your
ideas and input.

Share details
of what has worked for you
for upcoming editions.

The collegial sharing of tips
and ideas is a blessing for our
brothers and sisters in Christ.