

Purpose of this Communication Policy

This policy seeks to provide guidelines for ensuring appropriate, accurate, timely, and thorough communication within the Valley UU church community as well to the outside world. It is a requirement of all sectors of the church to communicate quickly and fully with the congregation about events, activities, and issues within the church community. Where issues of ministerial confidentiality are involved, only that information which may identify or affect the privilege of a congregant may be withheld.

What Is Communication?

Communication is a very fuzzy term to describe the process by which people connect with each other, impart information to each other, and finally understand each other. Communication can occur without a specific goal in mind if people feel that understanding has occurred in the process. Communication cannot be one way, it must receive feedback to be meaningful.

Communication is like the distinction between data, information, and knowledge. The number two billion is data, the phrase “two billion dollars in defense spending” is information, and “two billion dollars in defense spending was lost because of inadequate record keeping” is knowledge. The journey from a raw data item to a context in which that data item is meaningful is the process of communication.

External Communication

Who Officially Speaks for the Church?

In those situations where the church must make an official statement to the press, the public, or the authorities, only the Senior Minister or Board President may do so. If contacted by any outside entity regarding a statement, always refer them to either of the above. If they are not available, make no comment and tell them that the Senior Minister or Board President will contact them as soon as possible.

External Publicity

In those situations where a group within the church would like to publicize an event to invite the general public, they should follow the guidelines discussed in the *Publicity Policy*. This policy outlines the criteria for choosing a publicity method and provides descriptions of how to get your event into the public media.

Publicity Committee

VUU shall have a permanent *Publicity Committee* that will own the publicity policies and shall be the route through which groups can get guidance on publicity campaigns. The Committee shall also work with these groups to determine if an event is a candidate for an official publicity campaign.

Website

Anything published on the VUU website, it immediately available to the entire world. Web crawlers such as Google will find any new item and make it available through its search engine. Website analysis has shown that these web crawlers are continuously accessing the website and looking for additions and deletions.

Since the website is used by members as well as the outside world, the *Website Policy* seeks to limit only the posting of personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses. Names are redacted unless necessary for understanding. Posted newsletters and meeting minutes are redacted to first name and last initial, and specific elements of church business are removed (such as budget amounts).

Certain web pages are not linked to the website but can be reached through a specific URL. This prevents them from being accessed by the web crawlers. Such pages contain certain church data that is accessible to people who need it but is not publicly known.

Definitive versions of church handbooks and policies are also located on the website but also reached only through a specific URL. These definitive versions can be downloaded by anyone and should be the versions used for applying any changes. Updated versions of these documents should be submitted to the webmaster for posting as soon as they are approved.

Internal Communication

Internal communication is the process of communicating with members and friends about activities, events, and issues without extending it to the outside world. There are many modes of doing this. These include: email, the newsletter, telephone trees, and meetings. Each of these modes has its advantages and disadvantages and should be chosen for its effectiveness. See Figure 1 for a table showing these attributes for the many different modes.

Email is the most widely used form of communication, and it has its advantages and disadvantages. It is good for brief reminders and general information but attempting thoughtful discussions using it can often lead to misunderstandings. Review the *Email Policy* for more discussion of the best ways to use this tool.

The Communication Process

Here is a basic process for determining how you want to communicate.

Define your goals

Are you seeking information and understanding from people or are you trying to impart information to others so that they may understand.

Define your audience

People respond differently to certain types of communication and some audiences do not have access to many of its forms.

Choose your communication types

Active communication – needs a response

Passive communication – imparting general information

Urgent communication – must know immediately

Examine Figure 1 for the communication type that is most applicable to your needs. Most do not need any further research, but some require advance planning and the permission of church authorities to proceed.

Communication Method	Ease of Doing It	Coverage	Impact	Feedback Potential	Pros	Cons	Best Usage Examples
Newsletter article	Easy	100% of congregation and others	Minimal	Minimal	Good for posting information to possibly consult later	Some items will not be read or will not be long remembered	Sermon schedule; calendar of events
Email	Easy	Everyone who has an email address (assume a little less than 100% of congregation)	Moderate	Moderate	Comprehensive, near real-time; good two-way communication between church and congregation;	Passive because people still need to read their mail on a timely basis; can lead to nuisance traffic in pointless replies.	Reminders of events; reminders of important late-breaking church news; complements newsletter and announcements.
Web page	Moderate	Everyone in the world	Minimal	Minimal	Good for general information for outsiders; can be used as most up-to-date information source for members	Requires someone to enter it on web page; can get old and mistrusted fast if not kept up-to-date	Sermon schedule; history; links to other sites; calendar
Order of Service	Easy	Church attendees	Minimal	Minimal	Good to take home and put on bulletin board	People only read it if sermon is boring	Special inserts in conjunction with verbal announcement
Announcement	Easy	Church attendees	Very high	Very high	Good for energizing people immediately	Only heard by those who attend church that day	Draw attention to a sign-up table in the back of the church after the service
Special Meeting	Moderate	Only those who want to attend	Moderate	Moderate	Good for those who want to attend	Not many may want to attend	Planning meeting for an event
Information session	Moderate	Only those who want to attend	Moderate	High	Good for those who want to attend	Not many may want to attend	New by-laws information session
Focus groups	Difficult	Limited number of selected people	High	High	Generates specific opinions	Must be careful to select right cross-section of people	Feed back on what sort of adult RE classes to offer
Cottage meetings	Difficult	Only those want to attend	High	High	Great for specific purposes	Feedback can get watered down when consolidating the information	Opinions for long range planning
One on one	Very difficult	Limited number of selected people	Moderate	High	Generates specific opinions	It is still just one person's opinion	Conflict resolution
Congregational Meeting	Very difficult	Only those want to attend	High	Minimal	Useful for voting on church wide issues	Limited agenda	Bylaws changes; elections

Figure 1: Communication Matrix

