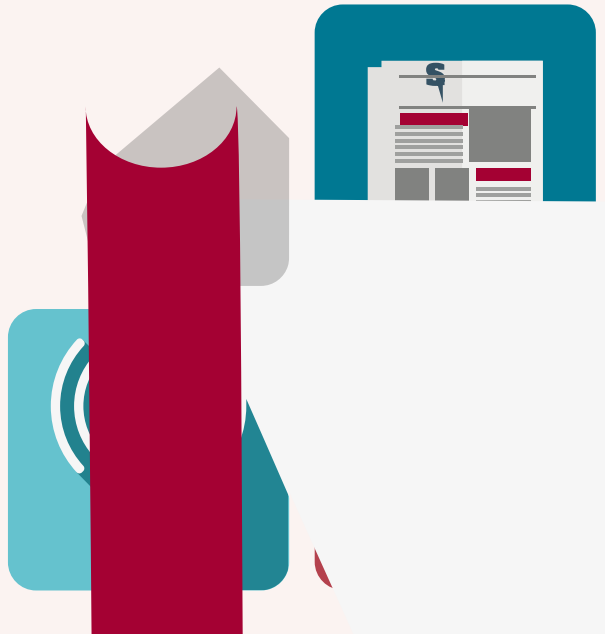


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A short guide for United Reformed churches



The United Reformed Church



Introduction

This short guide has been put together to help churches engage actively with the media, using it to promote their church and all that it is and does.

So, why bother with the media? There are at least four core reasons:

- To have your say
- To promote good news
- To restore the perspective: God is not dead!
- To correct incorrect reporting.

The material presented here was initially written for use within media training sessions run by the United Reformed Church media team.

We anticipate that this booklet will be used primarily as a resource to supplement the training sessions we deliver – but it clearly has a wider reach too. We hope any churches who perhaps feel a little intimidated by the prospect of dealing with journalists will discover that the rewards can be surprisingly good for surprisingly little effort: If you want some positive press coverage – a letter in a national broadsheet, a spot on local radio – read on.

This guide covers four main areas: getting your good news out; working out the most appropriate medium for your news and less news-oriented stories; writing letters to the editor; and handling bad news.

Many churches already enjoy strong relationships and professional dealings with the media; but these things are within the grasp of any and every church where ministers and volunteers are willing to learn the ropes.

This booklet has been written both to encourage you and to share some of the basic tools and information you will need to take the first steps on your media journey.

Gill Nichol

Head of communications

The United Reformed Church, October 2014

greed in our society, and challenges us to think about how we care for the most poor and vulnerable in our communities.

“Using song lyrics as the starting point provides Open Talk with an accessible way to complex subjects. I am really excited about this group and would encourage people to book the dates into their diary now – and come along for some great conversation in a convivial setting.”

The venue for all three Open Talk evenings is The Pony and Trap pub on Exeter Hill, Cullompton and all three will start at 7.45pm – on Wednesday 16 November, Wednesday 30 November and Wednesday 14 December. The sessions are expected to last around an hour and a half. ⁶

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▶ www.serum.org.uk ⁸

▶ www.serum.org.uk is a series of three open discussion sessions based on the format developed by Serum, a discussion forum based in London. For more information go to <http://www.moot.uk.net/2010/09/01/serum/>.

● www.reformed.org.uk is a pioneer minister working through the United Reformed Church minister. For more information please see: link to

www.reformed.org.uk comprises one hundred thousand people in 1600 congregations. It has brought together English Presbyterians, English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists and members of the Churches of Christ. Worldwide, more than 80 million Christians are members of the Reformed family of churches, the largest Protestant tradition. The name 'ReformedembRCan AMCID 217 B

• Review

Critical reflection on, or overview of, a new thing – whether a book, play, CD etc.

■ Feature

Explore a subject or issue in more depth than news, though features may or may not be news-focused. Features are often driven by interview/s, debate or an unfolding story.

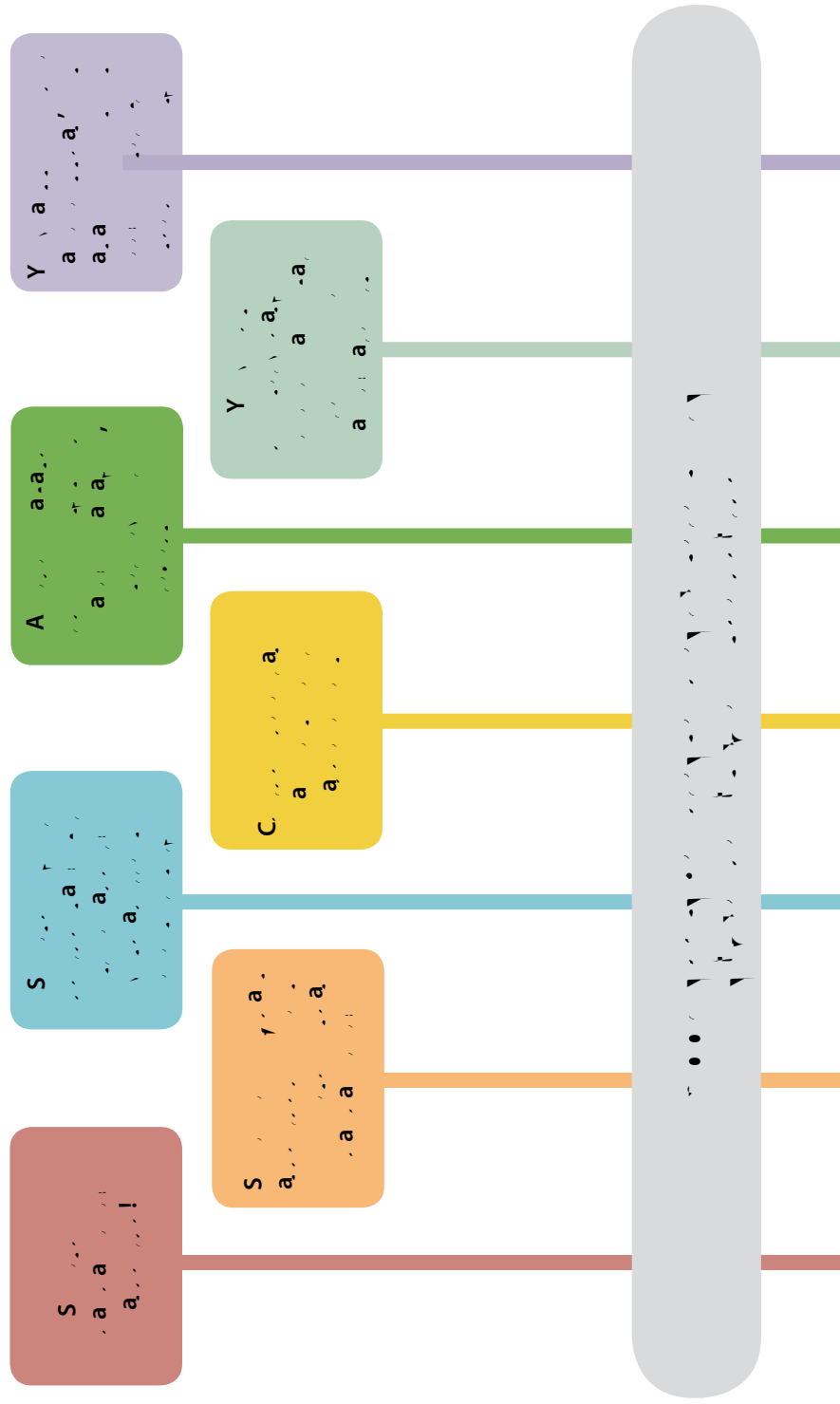
• Notice

Convey brief messages – often about events, services or projects where participation is desired. Sometimes secured with a small payment, they appear in many kinds of newspapers and magazines.

• Columnist's 'opinion' piece

Have a brief point to get across, usually in response to something. Most often, they express a perspective on a story in the publication, or on a wider current

U S T A





Here are a few top tips for winning non-news-related media exposure for your church:

There is no point writing a 1,000-word opinion piece to the comment editor of a magazine if they only publish 400-word articles written by in-house regulars. Take the time to study several examples of the article or programme-type you are targeting and make sure your submission fits the length, tone and content.


Every journalist is told to find their niche. Your church has a niche already –

church a mention in the media, even when nothing particularly notable is going on. If your minister is well-known and liked in the community, you could probably clinch them a regular column in a local magazine or newspaper. Or offer them up for an 'in the papers' discussion panel if your local or regional radio station has one. You may discover that one of your elders already writes reviews or gardening pieces for a local or special-interest publication. Might it be appropriate for them to include their church connection in their author biography?

3.3.3.3.3

Sometimes we just have to face it: what we thought was a great idea for a story turns out to have no media interest value at all. Ask yourself the tough questions and be open to this reality before you go to the trouble of pitching. Indeed, even if you have pitched your piece with confidence, be prepared for rejection; it happens to everyone. Just pick yourself up, dust your piece down and ask yourself – could this find a home in the church newsletter? (*For guidance on producing church newsletters, see our Church print and publications booklet.*)





Every editor wants a strong letters' page bursting with lively opinions and observations – like the ones in *Reform* magazine! But it's not something they can always boast – which is where you come in... Writing to local (or national) newspapers and magazines is an often-overlooked way to get your point of view across. Before you put pen to paper, read through these tips for writing letters – and, equally importantly, note our list of common mistakes that will make sure your letter ends up on the trash pile.

1. Editors look first for opinionated comments about stories in their publication. Use the story as your hook.
2. They also look for letters on relevant current events not yet covered in their pages – another hook for your story.
3. Remember, adding a church voice to a topical debate is worthwhile for its own sake – not just when you want to promote your church event/achievement.
4. Make a timely contribution to an existing letters page debate – but get in quick before it's gone off the boil!
5. End with impact – perhaps a demand, a prediction or a proclamation. Go on, be opinionated!
6. Be nice! Wit and humour are the best weapons.
7. Signing off with the name of an organisation lends significance to a letter. A great opportunity for your church – IF you have a genuine comment to share.

8. Do your homework – address your letter to the correct person; stick to word limits; get it in on time.
9. If it's a great letter that fits another publication, perhaps for a different reason, modify it and use it again!
10. A published letter in a decent magazine or newspaper = good news! Tell people about it, on your website, in your newsletter, or through social media.



1. Send off your missive without studying the target publication and the kind of letters they publish.
2. Forget the word limits – they can't possibly apply to you!
3. Offer a 'just because' essay on the history of your church.
4. Attempt to clinch a free advert for your church event.
5. Present a wide-ranging critique of six articles in the publication.
6. Get personally abusive/sarcastic.
7. Contribute more of the same to an ageing debate
8. Make unsubstantiated claims about a person, organisation or published article.
9. Ramble on for a bit – they are they experts after all, they can do the deciphering and editing!
10. Send in a brilliant, pertinent letter – a day too late for press, or without including your name and address.

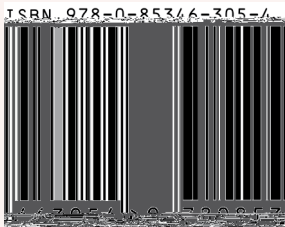


This booklet is part of a series on church communications published by the communications department of The United Reformed Church. Titles currently available are:

How to write a letter
How to write a report
How to write a speech
How to write a sermon
How to write a prayer
How to write a hymn
How to write a song
How to write a play
How to write a drama
How to write a film
How to write a television programme
How to write a radio programme
How to write a newspaper article
How to write a magazine article
How to write a book
How to write a leaflet
How to write a poster
How to write a brochure
How to write a newsletter
How to write a website
How to write a social media post
How to write a press release
How to write a press statement
How to write a press conference
How to write a press interview
How to write a press photograph
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