

PARISH BULLETIN BEST PRACTICES

Your bulletin is still an important tool in your arsenal and how the majority of parishioners get their parish news. Brand your publishing carefully. Your image – how your church is viewed by the community around you, depends a great deal on what you put out there ----- both digitally and in print. Just make sure you have an electronic copy available on your website each week. The following best practices in bulletin fundamentals, design, and content can assist you with providing a clear and concise message each week.

BULLETIN FUNDAMENTALS:

- **Welcome Message:**
Your Welcome Message should be one of the first things listed either on the cover or first inside page and should include a brief greeting from the Pastor that ties into the mission of your parish.
- **Vision/Messaging:**
How can you connect to people who could be reading the bulletin for the first time? Be sure to communicate the vision/mission/expectations and what steps people can take on the path to discipleship/stewardship. How does the message of Sunday's gospel reading/homily correlate to this week's bulletin? Don't just tell them how – tell them why. Keep the ratio of Information vs Inspiration (closer to 1:1 ratio).
- **Focus:**
Give weight to what is most important. Simplify and focus. "Why are we doing this?" What do they need to know and where or who do they respond to take the next step?
- **Contact Information:**
Would you list the table of contents on the cover of your book? Then why list all contact information on the cover of your bulletin? Save some space and only have the most contacted staff listed on the inside of your bulletin and direct them to your website for more info.
- **Repeat:**
Since your average parishioner isn't at Mass every week, you need to repeat your announcements at least **three times**. You will be amazed at how many people still say they didn't know about it.
- **Reduce amount of content:**
More is not better. In most cases, bulletins contain way too much information and it's hard for people to know what to respond to. Reduce the amount of information to the top 5-7 items (more for larger parishes) people need to know for the week.
- **Market your online resources:**
If you are not already doing an email version of your bulletin – you are missing out. Keep working to direct people to your website, social media, or mobile app (all great communication platforms) where they can access more detail of current church events and a more detailed online calendar. **NOTE:** Be sure your website is current and relevant.

BULLETIN DESIGN AND CONTENT:

- **Language:**

Spell out the “church” language. Make sure visitors/new parishioners will be able to understand what you are talking about. (For instance, they may not know what RCIA or many other acronyms mean.)
- **Layout/Design:**

Bulletin editors should make every effort to learn the basic fundamentals of layout and design. Imagine your bulletin is a magazine and lay it out in a coherent way that appeals to the eye. Make sure text and images are well balanced and organized. And it’s okay to have white space. You don’t have to fill every line of the bulletin. Look for inspiration online at this site and others: www.fromupnorth.com or YouTube tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/user/UltramanToronto>
- **Financials:**

Designate a section every week to communicate the parish’s current financial position. Report it in a way that can be easily understood by your “non-numbers” people. Start with listing weekly collection revenue (shown alongside what was budgeted.) Then add in a monthly recap (monthly revenue **less** monthly expenses = Net gain (or Loss). Also, list any fundraisers/special collections/annual appeal and their number statistics. People want to know the effort was worthwhile.
- **Advertiser of the Week:**

Once a month (weekly for large parishes), highlight an advertiser currently on the back of your bulletin. Feature this business on the inside of the bulletin thanking them for their support and suggesting patronage to that business.
- **Pictures:**

Clip Art is dead. Use Photos/Graphics to draw attention to what you want your audience to notice. Make sure photos are sized correctly and not just stretched out to fit a space. Use them to put a face on your parish and show faith in action.
- **Color:**

Color is nice but not necessarily a requirement. Most bulletin printers now include full color at no additional charge. For small parishes that may have to print their own, a bulletin that is neatly organized in black and white can speak volumes.
- **Fonts/Typography:**

Limit yourself to two or three fonts. Be selective with capitalization, bold, underlines, and italics. If you emphasize everything, you emphasize nothing! For additional resources visit <https://designschool.canva.com/> or for those book readers consider “Thou Shall Not Use Comic Sans: 365 Design Sins & Virtues by Seddon/Adams/Foster & Dawson”.
- **On-going Content:**

Periodic promotion/education for stewardship of time, talent & treasure, online giving, mobile app downloads, email address collection, parish website, etc. can be promoted individually in 3 consecutive week segments. You can do this every couple of months as a reminder.