

Appendix D: Communications Department

BACKGROUND

The Communications Department was established in 2014. As well as providing support for districts and national agencies, LCA Communications serves the Office of the Bishop, the departments of the Executive Officer of the Church and Local Mission, commissions, and churchwide projects and campaigns. Increasingly it is also serving districts and congregations. The department also manages the direction and production of *The Lutheran* and, from April 2016, also the development and churchwide implementation of the Website Integration Project (due to conclude at the end of 2018).

This report covers the work of the Communications Department from 2015–2018. The overall aim of the Communications Plan over this period has been to provide ‘Enabling’ support for Strategic Priorities 1 and 2 of the LCA Strategic Direction 2013–2018. This is spelt out in four key areas of the Strategic Direction, namely:

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

B1 – Increase enthusiasm for mission by sharing how love is coming to life through individuals, families and communities

B2 – Support LCA ministries to effectively communicate and engage individuals, families and communities to go and grow

B3 – Improve collaboration between the ministries of the LCA to establish an integration of communications around the theme ‘where loves comes to life’

B4 – Achieve internal LCA communication that is efficient, coordinated and relevant

ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST PLAN

B1 – INCREASE ENTHUSIASM FOR MISSION BY SHARING HOW LOVE IS COMING TO LIFE THROUGH INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Our primary work in this area has been to assist the mission departments to share their stories by:

- a. developing effective means of communications, including websites, eNews, ‘Story of the Week’ videos and bulletin inserts, social media and dedicated coverage in every edition of *The Lutheran*, and
- b. providing expertise in writing, editing and design. The centralisation of communications services under one department has been a highly successful strategic initiative in the accomplishment of this goal.

B2 – SUPPORT LCA MINISTRIES TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO GO AND GROW

This has been the area of most obvious growth during the life of the Communications Plan. Our work in this area has covered a wide range of communications support services, including:

- a. Graphic design, writing and editing support to assist in effective communication and also to develop baselines for quality and professionalism
- b. Rollout of e-communications (eNews) for most national departments and districts
- c. Development and maintenance of social media (LCA Facebook) platform
- d. With the generous support of the New South Wales District, development of an integrated website network across the whole church, including national departments and agencies, districts and congregations.

Demand for support is now plateauing, however, and it may even fall off somewhat over the next synodical period. This is because much of the development work has been done and

foundations laid. From 2019 national departments and agencies should become increasingly self-sufficient in managing their own communications, with Communications Department staff serving more in the roles of oversight, support, training and quality assurance. Attention is now likely to turn towards better supporting districts in their communications needs, and we are also seeing a steady rise in requests for support from congregations.

B3 – IMPROVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE MINISTRIES OF THE LCA TO ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATION OF COMMUNICATIONS AROUND THE THEME ‘WHERE LOVES COMES TO LIFE’

The adoption of the tagline ‘where love comes to life’ has been a key factor in developing a sense of oneness and common direction across the LCA/NZ. The tagline is now firmly embedded as part of our church culture and vernacular, and this is seen as a significant achievement in terms of drawing the church together under one shared ‘mission statement’. Our work in this area has involved:

- a. Standardised branding and developing common/consistent messages across national departments and districts
- b. Coordinated designs for department, agency and project promotional materials, including banners, brochures, larger publications and online media
- c. Development of branding, design and editing manuals.

For national departments, our work is largely complete. Training for department staff is expected to be completed by the end of 2018, and from 2019 most departments should have the capacity to liaise directly with graphic designers, printers and other approved service providers for most standard communications services. This will relieve pressure on Communications staff in this area, and thus enable these resources to be directed towards assisting districts and congregations and also into emerging areas of focus for the department.

B4 – ACHIEVE INTERNAL LCA COMMUNICATION THAT IS EFFICIENT, COORDINATED AND RELEVANT

This goal has been achieved, thanks to a large extent to the collaboration and cooperation of national department managers and staff. The work involved in achieving this outcome is described in sections B1, B2 and especially B3 above. The role of the department in this area will now move towards oversight, quality assurance and continuous improvement.

SUCCESSSES

Successes are outlined above, under the respective Communication Plan goals.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Overall there has been a ‘critical mass’ of support for our work. National departments and agencies, bishops and other district leaders, congregation leaders and members, as well as many pastors have in the main embraced the communications advances we have made.

Roadblocks are primarily encountered at the local level, where some pastors and/or congregation leaders are not receptive to messages from the national office and thus many of our messages are not even opened, let alone passed on. This roadblock affects all areas of our work and also the work of many or most other national agencies and departments.

The result is that a large part of our LCA/NZ community never learn about the support or services available to them or are never given opportunity to be encouraged by our ‘where love comes to life’ stories. We often receive feedback from congregation members: ‘We never hear anything from the LCA’. The opposite response is heard just as frequently: ‘You are bombarding us with information; leave us alone.’

The solution is not to simply produce more messages or implement different methods of delivering the messages. In fact, that approach would likely be counter-productive. Instead, work needs to be done in the area of relationship-building and developing trust. This cannot be achieved without concerted efforts to listen and to learn, preferably face to face. Therefore, now that much of our communications infrastructure has been built, we consider 'engagement' to be the next major area of work for the Communications Department, as a critical element in the overall need to effectively manage change across the LCA/NZ.

The engagement focus could cover at least these two areas:

1. Face-to-face conversations with pastors and congregation leaders in order to actively listen to each other, to develop trusting and respectful relationships, to open up two-way communication; to discover how we can better support and encourage each other
2. Develop new methods of engaging directly with people in the pews, utilising diverse and emerging media.

RISKS

Risks are identified throughout the report, but in summary:

1. Difficulty getting our messages past gatekeepers. Mitigation: investigate the reasons; and explore how to regain trust, confidence and open two-way communication; implement face-to-face contact where possible and alternative ways of engaging using diverse media.
2. Capacity to protect the church's investment in websites and e-communications against cyber attacks, maintain compliance, and to continuously improve; and also to provide timely support for users. Mitigation: Apply available resources to this area (moving them from the development phase to security/improvement areas), and monitor capacity and effectiveness.
3. Financial capacity of the department. Mitigation: With the need to both maintain and improve existing communications channels and to also build new ones, a review of the expectations the Church has of the department, its capacity and funding model will need to be conducted.
4. Financial capacity of *The Lutheran*. Mitigation: (a) Trial pay-as-you-go plan; (b) develop a digital edition; (c) analyse alternative models, eg fewer editions per year; (d) implement as quickly as possible alternative ways to communicate directly with members.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

In common with other departments, the Communications Department experiences pressure to maintain and improve existing services, add more services, keep up with best practice, manage compliance and security issues, and respond to questions, problems and requests for service. There is an ongoing balancing act to work effectively and efficiently, while allowing margin to respond to issues and emergencies, particularly those of a technological nature.

However, despite keeping operational overheads to the minimum, the Communications Department is likely to run on a deficit budget in 2018 and ongoing. The number of agencies using our services is also a major factor in assessing our capacity – as we expand from serving mainly national agencies to also districts, congregations and possibly aged- and community-care centres. A review of the expectations of the department, its capacity and its funding model will need to be conducted.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MAJOR PROJECTS 2015–2018

Website Integration Project

From 2016 to 2018 the New South Wales District contributed a total of \$352,000 towards the development of website integration for the entire LCA/NZ, including the LCA 'mothership', national departments and projects, districts and congregations. This amount includes the building of websites for all New South Wales congregations. All the projects are on track to conclude at the end of 2018, on time and on budget. On behalf of the entire LCA/NZ, we express our thanks to the New South Wales District for these generous gifts, the results of which will benefit the entire LCA/NZ for decades to come.

The Lutheran

In 2015 subscribers to *The Lutheran* numbered 6974. In 2018 that had fallen to 5914. The losses are attributable mainly to our ageing demographic: failing eyesight; pensioners sharing one edition to save costs; moving to aged-care facilities where one or two editions are shared between many; death. We also face the same issues print publications across the world face: competition from online media which is offered for free. There is a sense of holding back the tide now, for as long as we can. *The Lutheran* has served the LCA/NZ faithfully and well for over 50 years as our primary communique. It is unlikely that it will be able to serve in that role for another decade; at least, not without support from Church funds. There is therefore an urgent need to find ways of communicating directly with individual members via other media.

Issues (Media) Management

At the request of the College of Bishops, the development of a churchwide Issues Management Plan (also known as Media Management) was commenced. A consultant was engaged to develop the framework, and stakeholder groups have provided feedback. It is anticipated that the plan will be finalised in 2018. In 2019 the plan will be rolled out across the LCA/NZ so that all leaders, including congregation leaders, will know how to respond to incidents which may attract the interest of the media or where the media is already involved. In addition, bishops and other key leaders will undertake face-to-face training in engaging with the media

Social Media Policy

The Communications Department drafted the LCA Social Media Policy and, after General Church Council approval, released the draft for consultation and feedback. In February 2018 GCC approved the policy for churchwide adoption. The Communications Department is now writing supporting documents, particularly those that can be used by agencies and congregations in adopting the LCA policy locally. Procedures and guidelines for using social media in the context of ministries involving children and young adults will be among the supporting documents.

Longest Lutheran Lunch

LCA Communications has overseen the operations of Longest Lutheran Lunch through this reporting period, though it will come under the umbrella of Local Mission from 2019. Known events numbered 108 in 2015, 152 in 2016 and 148 in 2017. This does not take into account that some congregations join up with others in their parish or with neighbouring congregations to host joint events. Overall the interest in holding an annual Longest Lutheran Lunch remains relatively high, which is encouraging. On the downside it appears that most congregations do not actively use the lunch as a way of connecting with their communities. This will remain a key focus of our endeavours, especially when the Longest Lutheran Lunch comes under the banner of Local Mission.