

DIOCESAN

Catholic Life **Every Day**

Design Guide

Well-designed, thoughtful communication at the parish and diocesan level can take many forms. Such communication helps us do the primary work of the Church: evangelization.

You'll notice that some of the following tips and suggestions are the same for different forms of communication. We aren't trying to be repetitious; it's just that what constitutes good design works in many different formats. Let's get started!

Bulletin Design Tips

Contextual Covers: The cover is 'front page news'. Make it timely and relevant, tying it to the liturgy and/or parish life. A static cover that never changes will not encourage parishioners to open the bulletin and learn what is inside. Consider a table of contents on the cover, so people can find what they are looking for easily. Think about using clear photos of parish events, such as the church picnic, the blessing of the pets, or First Communion to draw people to opening the bulletin.

We offer our bulletin customers both free covers and free design service. Using liturgically-based art work can in itself be a form of evangelization and meditation. Color, in a strategic manner, is also a great way to create an inviting bulletin cover.

Leading the Eye Across and Down: Imagine you are looking at the inside of your bulletin, with a page on the left and one on the right. You want to design with both pages in mind. Position items strategically. For example, the more important an item is, the higher it should go on the page. You can also emphasize items with color, different fonts or different sizes of font. Use a visual cue, such as an arrow, to point out an important element. All of these help the reader notice and distinguish certain items on those two pages, by leading the reader's eye from top to bottom, across both pages.

Organize the Layout with Intent: A bulletin (just like a newspaper) should "lead" with the most important items. You can also departmentalize information, using categories/headlines such as "School News" or "Youth Ministry." Placing these items in roughly the same place week-to-week saves parishioners from having to hunt down news that is important to them. Use the technique of putting important information (weekly calendar, Pastor's letter) at the end; this means the reader will at least skim through the entire bulletin - and hopefully other items will catch their eye!

Another good way to organize and draw attention to a particular item is to put a border around that piece. It sets it off visually from the rest of the page. Even if you do not have a full color bulletin, you can shade a piece of information to draw the eye. With all things, make sure you only use this technique sparingly.

Using Color and Images: We are naturally drawn to great photos and beautiful colors. Even a black and white page can capture attention when you add an image of a smiling parishioner or children playing.

You can use color to correspond to the liturgical season or to draw attention to a certain piece of information. However, don't go overboard. Touches of color are attractive; an entire rainbow of colors in one bulletin is distracting.

Photos of parish events are terrific! People love to see these, regardless if they are color or black and white. Someone on staff can use their phone to take good quality pictures. Another option is to seek out a good amateur or professional photographer in your parish, and ask if they will donate their time at important parish events.

Graphics and photos should be high resolution. For graphic professionals this is defined at 300 dpi. If you are taking your own pictures, the image files size should be 1Mb or more. Also, you don't want to take a small photo and make it bigger; it will get distorted. It's far easier to start with a large photo and make it smaller.

Fonts: Simplicity is key here. You want fonts that are clear and easy to read. Also, don't use 6 or 7 different fonts in the bulletin. Better to stick with two; you can always use a larger size font, underline or bold for emphasis and to draw the eye of the reader. It's also good to use the same fonts every week. It gives your bulletin a professional, consistent look.

Making Use of Columns: Make use of 'guides' or 'grids' in your bulletin software to create clean, clear visual lines in your design. You want your columns to be straight and even. Guides and grids can help you create a balanced, visually pleasing layout.

Poster/Flyer Design Tips

Color: You can definitely use color more freely on a poster or flyer. Think about the message you are trying to convey. If you're looking for a sense of energy, go with bold, bright colors. A message that is more serious might call for more subtle shades.

Fonts: Here again, you have more freedom with fonts than you will with a bulletin. If you're creating a poster, you'll want to use a larger font, of course, but you might use more artistic fonts (such as a calligraphy font) as well. Use one font for the headline, and another for the rest of the information.

Creating a Visual Hierarchy: Think of a triangle balanced on its point, with the larger part at the top of the page. You'll want to use this image for poster/flyer designs. The most important information and the largest font should be at the top, with details in smaller font near the bottom.

If you have only a small amount of text, choose a bold graphic. If you have more information, let the font be the focus. With more copy, break it up into "chunks;" give a block of information, then some blank space, and another block of information. (You'll notice this is the technique we've used here on this Design Guide!) It gives the reader's eye a chance to rest and then move on.

Creating a Sense of Energy and Emotion: If it's important enough to create a poster or flyer, it's important enough to grab the reader's attention. You want them to see that poster from across the room and be interested enough to walk over and take a look. Using strong photos and graphics can create that sense of emotion and energy. Even fonts can create interest.

Let's say you're creating a poster to inform parents about upcoming baptism classes. A picture of your church taken from the parking lot and a list of classes and dates: not much energy there. A photo of Father baptizing a baby that captures the expression on the baby's face, plus a well-worded invitation for parents? Now that will draw attention!

Balancing Act: Graphic designers talk about balance of composition. You don't want the top of the poster to be all pictures, and the bottom all text. If one side or the top or bottom looks "heavy" with pictures or fonts, you don't have a balanced design. Experiment and move things around until you have a good balance of elements.

Don't Be Dense: A poster or flyer is meant to give a brief amount of information. That's why they almost always have a line like, "For more information, call..." If you put too much information on it, people will not read it. You want to give the reader just enough information to make them interested. A poster or flyer needs to be easy to read and to understand.

Banner Design Tips

Creating Visual Hierarchy: Just as you would a poster or flyer (see above), you want to create a banner from the top down. The most important information and the largest font should be at the top, with details in smaller font near the bottom.

Fonts: Fonts on banners can be a little tricky. You might choose a cursive font that looks great on paper, but in a huge font on a banner can be hard to read. Experiment a little. Remember, though: the purpose of a banner is to make is easy to read from across a room. Also, use only one or two fonts on a banner to keep it looking clear and crisp.

Saying a Lot With a Little: Banners are all about the image. You want a picture (whether a photograph or a graphic design) that will tell a story. Adding just a few words then drives home the point. Too many graphics or too much wording can make a banner look jumbled.

Creating a Focal Point: Imagine a Lenten banner with a graphic of a crown of thorns. The graphic is just slightly out of focus, and the color used a bold purple. Then, the words, “Pray. Fast. Give Alms” are in large font at the bottom. With just a few design elements, you’ve got a great banner. That focal point - the crown of thorns - grabs attention, and those few words remind the viewer of our Lenten theme. This banner tells an entire story.

Balancing Act: (See above.) A banner should have a balance of pictures and words, a balance of sizes, and not be “top heavy” with either one.

Make it Legible: “Legible” doesn’t just mean a person can read it. It also means that the point of the banner is easily understood. For instance, it’s clear that this banner is about downloading myParish App, not about a conference, the bulletin, and Facebook.

Design For Eye-Level: You just purchased a gorgeous piece of art at the local art fair. You bring it home and immediately hang it on the wall. . . 6 inches off the ground. No! Of course you wouldn’t do that! You want it to be seen and enjoyed. Our eyes naturally see things at eye level first, so when designing a banner put that great graphic or picture at eye level.

Email Design Tips

This section is not about every email you send out. Rather, the parish office might send out a bulk email during Advent with the Christmas Mass schedule, or a bulk email about the parish building fund.

Content: Focus your message and be concise. We all have lots of emails in our inbox, and you only have a few seconds to grab the reader’s attention.

Layout: Give the email a title, and make it descriptive! “A Note From Father” doesn’t tell the reader much, but “Building Fund Update” is specific. Include your parish logo.

Make it quick! Most of us give less than 15 seconds of our attention to an email.

Organize well. Break the information up into short paragraphs. If you do need to send a longer email, use slightly larger and bold font (just like we’ve done with this Design Guide) to help the reader skim and still have a good idea of the content.

Keep it professional. The font should be clear and legible, and no smaller than 12 point size. Emails are not the best place for creativity - keep it simple and easy to read. Use one font and one color.

Social Media Design Tips

Not all churches use social media and that's fine; those that do typically stick to Facebook and maybe Instagram. Some priests use YouTube to record homilies or simply reach out to folks in a less formal manner than a homily. If you do use social media, keep a few things in mind.

Pictures, Pictures, Pictures: Social media relies on pictures. In fact, Instagram is all about photos! Even on Facebook, a post with a picture is far more likely to be read than the same post with only text.

For a parish, use pictures of people in your parish! If you just built a new church, then by all means, show it off. Otherwise, use pictures of real people in your parish doing something: having fun at the Easter egg hunt or serving Mother's Day brunch.

Be In the Know: If your parish is on social media, make sure everyone on staff knows the diocesan guidelines for social media usage, and has a copy of it handy. If your diocese does not have a policy, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a great one on their website.

Timing is Everything: Social media moves at a brisk pace. If you visit a parish's Facebook page in April, and they haven't posted anything since Christmas ... you've just discovered how important (or rather unimportant) social media is to them. You don't need to put up a dozen Facebook posts a day, but you should commit to at least two posts a week.

If you're the person tasked with social media, and you're not very comfortable doing it, ask for help. Another staff member may really be excited about this task. Almost every parish has an adult who is savvy regarding social media. Ask for a tutorial. You could even ask that person if they'd be willing to donate their time to the parish, as part of their stewardship, and contribute to the parish Facebook page.

Get to the Point: More than any other medium we've discussed here, social media requires brevity. Twitter allows you only 140 characters - spaces included! While you can have a little more fun with social media, you don't want to write five paragraphs on the status of the new parking lot.

Keep it visual. Keep it interesting. Keep it short.



Diocesan Design

A DESIGN AGENCY FOR THE CHURCH

Diocesan Design is our in-house design agency here to help you in whatever way they can. Our team has helped parishes, dioceses, and schools with projects as small as a poster design to as large as a parish rebranding.

Whether you need help from the very start, or with the finishing touches, our designers are here to assist you with custom visuals at every stage.

DiocesanDesign.com