Tips to Correspondents

Aim for Brevity. Once you have written an article, read it over to make sure that you have given us the five W's (WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN WHY) in the briefest and clearest form. After all, if you take up too much space, another congregation will not be able to get its news in as well.

Ask yourself, What is newsworthy? Sometimes editing of your copy is necessary because of limited magazine space, an abundance of news submissions, or a lack of conformity to editorial guidelines. If you take careful note of what is going on in your congregation and report it accurately and quickly, then the need for your copy to be edited is minimized.

Whenever a group in your church does something that is not routine, it deserves mention in your article. **Always** put the more important items first in your article; those of lesser importance leave to the end. This will help us if we have to edit out some of your material. Articles that are too long are frequently passed up by the readers, but if some event is particularly significant, perhaps it would deserve a separate "feature article" with a photo all its own. We would be glad to help you with this.

As a good rule of thumb to determine what is newsworthy, take a back copy of the *Witness* and turn to the news items from a congregation with which you are not well acquainted. The kind of thing you like to learn from reading that article is the same kind of thing you should be writing up for your congregation. Of course, we realize that tastes differ, but give it a try.

Use Pictures. Whenever you are able to secure good photos of important events in your congregation, please forward them to us to be considered for publication. Please label all people or events in your photos, so that we can write captions if needed. If you need your photos returned, please write that on the back and include the address.

Tips on photography:
1. Send clear black-and-white prints or color prints with good light and dark contrast. Digital photos with good resolution can be attached to e-mail or put on disk and mailed. Do not send slides.
2. Try to avoid formal "mug shots" that look like a police lineup. Aim for shots of natural action.
3. Whenever possible include people in your photos, not merely scenes or inanimate objects.

Avoid Editorializing. The pages of the *Witness* are made available free of charge for congregational news items. However, we are most interested in getting the facts, not personal editorializing.

Here are some examples of non-news editorializing to avoid:
1. We invite all you who are in the area to attend our centennial.
2. We wish our graduates much success in their future careers.
3. We welcome into our membership John and Jane Doe.
4. We are thankful for the beautiful new offering plates.

While certainly true statements, these sentences are not news, but editorializing. These statements would only be newsworthy if:
1. You begged all in the area to stay away.
2. You wished none of your graduates got jobs.
3. You shunned John and Jane Doe and forbade them membership.
4. You were disgusted with the ugly offering plates.

"News style" for these items would read something like this:
1. The centennial will be on Oct. 14.
2. Five members graduated from college this year.
3. Mr. and Mrs. Doe were received into membership on May 17.
4. Mr. Bill Smith donated brass offering plates in memory of his wife.

Grammatically speaking, news style always uses third person. This means writing "the congregation" instead of "us" or "we" or "our church."

Don't include these items:

1. Vacations of members unless they went on very unusual and extensive trips.
2. Minor details of socials and meetings.
3. Lists of officers in organizations other than major ones (e.g. president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer).
4. Reports of minor illnesses.
5. Names of guest ministers unless they have come for a special purpose.
6. Visitors to the congregation unless from considerable distance and for a special purpose.
7. Remember to avoid attempts at "humor" or "cuteness"––the news columns are devoted to facts only.
8. Those news items that should be submitted for publication in the Brief Notes section, including graduations, marriages, baptisms, births, anniversaries, and death notices. You might mention general information about these subjects in your news article, such as "five children and two adults were baptized in the month of February." Leave names and specifics for Brief Notes.

Prepare your copy. You can type your article or write it by hand. The ideal for our equipment is to receive it attached to an e-mail file or on computer disk, but we know this is not always possible. Here are some guidelines to minimize mistakes and problems when your submission is entered into our computer.

If you type, please
- double space,
- correct with correction fluid or pencil in the margin (not pen),
- use big margins, with at least a 1-1/2" margin at the bottom of a page.
- *avoid* justifying text or using all capital letters or bold face.

We can use most common Mac or PC word processing files. However, if you submit a computer disk, please send a printout of the article with the disk, in case we have compatibility problems. Label your disk with your name, address, name of file, and indicate if you wish the disk to be returned.

If you write, try to make your writing as legible as possible. Print all names to reduce the possibility of mis-spellings when we typeset or scan them into our publishing system.

Know what is considered advertising. Memorials and personal notes of thanks and other material of this nature are not regarded as news. For these items we follow our advertising policy for rates. An exception to this is memorials, which are not billed at advertising rates but do incur a fee.

Memorials
Congregations, societies, or individuals submitting unsolicited formal obituaries are charged a processing fee of $2.00 per column inch for a 3-column page and $1.50 for a 4-column page. There is no charge for death notices in Brief Notes.

Ten Ways to Keep Your Congregation in the News

1. For your own reference, ***keep files*** of all bulletins and special programs used by your congregation.

2. Plan a ***set time*** when you will forward your congregational news to the *Witness*. We want to hear from each congregation regularly, so why not try setting aside the first of every month as your regular time for deciding what material you may have to send us?

3. In the meantime, be on the watch for ***news items***. Our policy will be not to print any "news" items that reach us ***more than three months*** after the event reported took place.

4. If some special event takes place in your congregation (a dedication, anniversary, ordination, some special program, etc.), try to have someone ***take a good photo***. Aim for action; avoid "mug shots" whenever possible.

5. When something particularly special occurs in your congregation, try describing it in ***a brief news article*** ––approximately 350-500 words.

6. If your congregation boasts any unusual individual you would like to tell the rest of the church about, ***consider writing a brief feature story*** on this person and include photographs.

7. With each news article you send in, ***include a list*** of marriages, deaths, births, baptisms, anniversaries, and graduations for the Brief Notes section of the magazine. Please use the forms provided for this purpose. Write us or photocopy if you need more forms.

8. Always ***type your article*** when you can, leaving wide margins. Feel free to use e-mail.

9. If your congregation publishes any ***newsletters***, please put the *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* on the mailing list.

10. Refer to the enclosed page ***"Tips to Correspondents"*** for additional help.

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Keep the news coming.

Many people want to know what your congregation is doing.

And, like you, they want to read about it while the news is fresh. So send us short accounts

of your congregation news — and send them frequently.