



And now for the notices

TN93 Training Notes series: Communication

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Training Notes on giving out notices? Really?

You can understand why service leaders need training in liturgy, why musicians should value improving their leading of the singing, and why preachers could do with some help for their sermons.

You might even agree that welcomers need help to do their job properly. But giving out the notices?! It's so straightforward.

But I think you might agree with me that this part of Sunday is not always the brightest point in many churches' services. These notes seek to rescue this humble activity, show how to do it well, and so turn it into worship for the King, even if it is about the programme for this week. If you want to include spoken notices in a service, it's worth grasping a vision of what they *could* and *should* be.

Stay with me. This gets exciting!

Four key principles

Before we look at how to do it well, let's examine some basics. Here are four key points.

1 **Spoken notices are different from those that are printed**

The first thing to understand is that print and speech are two very different media. It is a nonsense simply to read out printed notices in a church service.

You need ***print for detail***. If all those coming to the rehearsal need to meet in the church car park at 7.15 pm. prompt on Friday and bring their copies of the music with them plus a notebook, Bible and money for refreshments, it's no good saying that at the front and expecting everyone to remember it all five days later. You put that in the paper or email notice-sheet or send those involved a personal message.

You need **speech for persuasion**. That written notice will have the required information but it's put in a pretty bland way. If you want to encourage people that it's worth coming to this and really important that they do, you need someone who can put that across up-front – and probably remind some people in person afterwards.

You cannot easily persuade people in print, and there is little point in putting detail into spoken announcements.

2 **People want news about people more than information about events**

I have already covered this point in detail in Training Notes TN38, *We've got news for us!* These two sets of notes, TN38 and TN93, need to be read together.

The point is that if you want people to listen and then respond, you need to bring a human element and the idea of 'news' into each notice. To bring the human aspect into the example above, the speaker needs to say they are going to the rehearsal and eagerly looking forward to it (and speak with the body language of enthusiasm – without overdoing it). The message is then 'Come with me!' instead of 'Here is information'.

It is therefore important that any notices slot includes family news: what has happened to whom? How can everyone rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep? Include too reports back from key meetings or events and breaking news of all kinds. It is not just about the church programme.

3 **Spoken notices are part of the worship, not a TV advertisement break**

You need to see notices as part of your worshipping life together. If they are not, why are you giving them out in the service? That means you teach the congregation that family news is a vital aspect of what is going on during an event when your aim is to meet with God and with each other. You need to manage the notices as effectively as you seek to lead any other aspect of the service.

It also means that where the spoken notices go in the liturgy depends on what is included each week. Some weeks they will fit well within the intercessions because you want everyone to pray for what is being explained. Some weeks they may need to follow the sermon to provide an application of the Bible teaching that day. In other weeks they may come at the very start of the service to set the scene for all that is to follow (this assumes your congregation arrives on time, of course!). Do you want the children in for this notice? If so, that will help you define when to do it.

4 **There are many possibilities**

Printed notices don't just go on a notice-sheet: they may be better on displays, scrolling screens as people arrive, in newsletters or magazines, in personal emails, on social media, on the website, on banners towed behind an aeroplane circling the church. OK, just checking you are still reading this! But the unusual is a good way to grab attention.

Spoken notices can also be given out in small groups or through one-to-one work or at special meetings. If during the service, arrange for different people to do them. Why not ask the drama or other communications group to put across something special in mime, song or dance? Or do a very quick interview or other twosome – though you will not have much time? Or have a 30 second video clip? The message is then much more likely to get through.

But in all this it may be wise to abandon the N word and terms such as 'Intimations' in Scotland, because they lead to expectations of boredom.

How to do it well

Given those four principles, here are ten further ideas for how to give out notices effectively so people listen and take the action you are wanting them to take.

1 **Clarify the headline**

Spoken announcements need to keep it very simple. Write out what you want to say in one sentence or as up to three bullet points. You want the news headline. 'There's a great rehearsal on Friday and we want you there.' Or perhaps, more importantly, 'There's a great event next Sunday and we need you at the rehearsal on Friday'. The detail will all go in the notice-sheet or wherever, remember. Now start the notice straight in with the headline.

2 **Know why you want to communicate it**

If you are not convinced at the importance of the reason, you won't communicate your own enthusiasm. So ask 'Why?' Then keep asking it until you get back to the real reason. Once you are convinced your enthusiasm will come through naturally. One way to prepare is to list the actions you want to see as a result of this notice. Following this point should reduce the number of spoken notices too; you do not want too many.

3 **Identify who it's for**

Define the core group you want to get through to. It may be newcomers, or families, or small-group members. In each of these cases the 'same' notice may need to be expressed in different ways and placed at different times in the service.

4 **Check the timing**

Most spoken notices need to be snappy and all over in a minute or two. Inexperienced notice-givers may take much longer and lose everyone after the first few seconds. If you have one minute, you need to rehearse it and prune it. But, as it's headline not detail, this should not prove a problem.

5 **Anticipate the likely blockages**

It's worth considering the likely blockages. These range from lack of preparation, to people having been sitting for too long without stretching their legs, to late-comers distracting people as they arrive, to the PA playing up. Try to minimise the risk of anything you see as likely. Practise on site if you are not used to the PA – you need to throw your voice to the back of the church and not whisper into the microphone.

6 **Pay attention to how you appear**

Distractions come in all kinds of styles, including what you are wearing. Are you emotionally intelligent enough to work out that your tone of voice, speed of delivery, facial expression and the way you stand will all impact the message? Try not to read it out: you want it to be natural and you need eye contact with the congregation.

7 **Check you are the right person**

At some point you need to work out if you are the right person. You may need a gifted communicator (I hope that is you!), a specialist team (such as the drama group or

choir), someone in authority to give the message some weight (a church leader perhaps). The traditional idea of the notices being read out by a church office-holder deserves to be buried.

8 **Surprise people**

Most people expect notices to be dull, so occasional surprises may help. Some of the other ideas already mentioned may do the trick (putting them at different points of the service, a video clip, using a specialist group, and so on). But you should be able to think up other ways that will not upset people while keeping them on their toes.

9 **Watch the feedback**

The congregation will be giving you messages as you give yours so learn from them and adjust your presentation in the light of them (you may need to pause for laughter or increase your emphasis if they seem tired). Then analyse it all afterwards and learn lessons for next time. Ask your friends and family for their *honest* opinion. In particular watch for actual response: if you wanted everyone at the rehearsal did everyone come? If not, why not?

10 **Cover those missing**

The spoken notices will only be heard by those present (unless others watch your church's livestream or listen online). So who was missing who needs to hear? You may need to consider how to get through to them too.

These notes seek to increase the expectation on the value of spoken notices. We need to break people's expectations:

- that notices are dull and you can switch off;
- that they repeat the notice-sheet;
- that they will be done badly;
- that they are not really part of what you are here for.

And of course, the principles put across here all apply to everything else up-front too: leading the service and preaching. But we'll stick with the notices for now!

For an example of a spoken report turned into 'news' in an interview format, read Training Notes TN38. For more detailed advice (aimed at preachers), read Article A19.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN93. See also Articles A19, *Speaking so that people listen*, and A54, *How to get a message across*, plus Training Notes TN2, *Ten steps to help you communicate*, TN16, *Interviews in church services*, and TN38, *We've got news for us!*

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN93 under Communication.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>