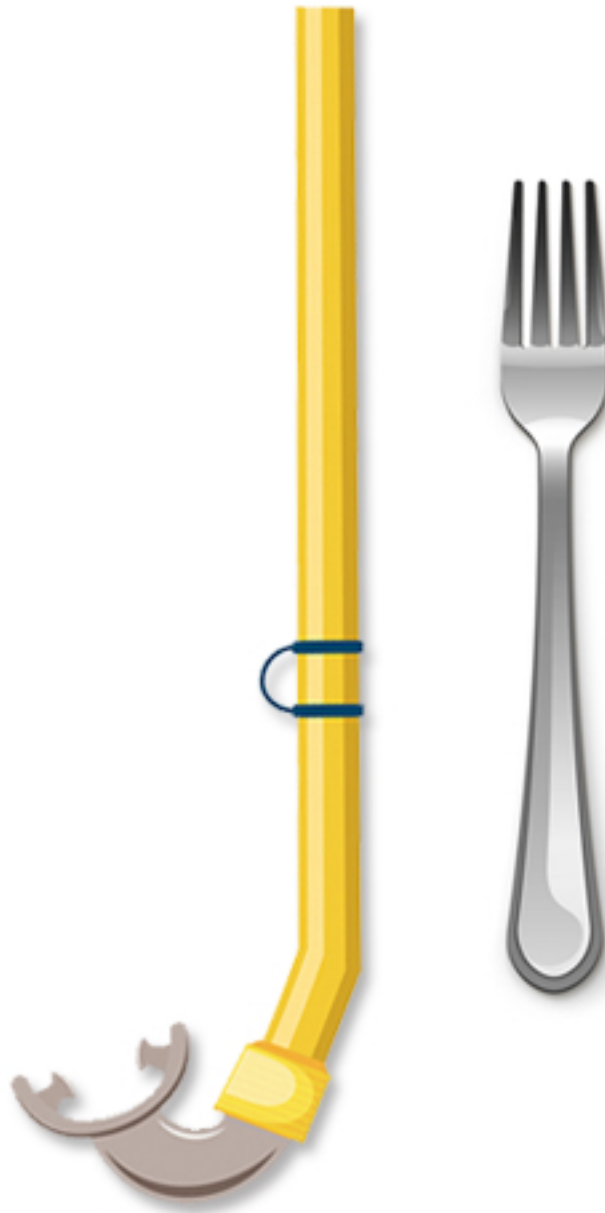
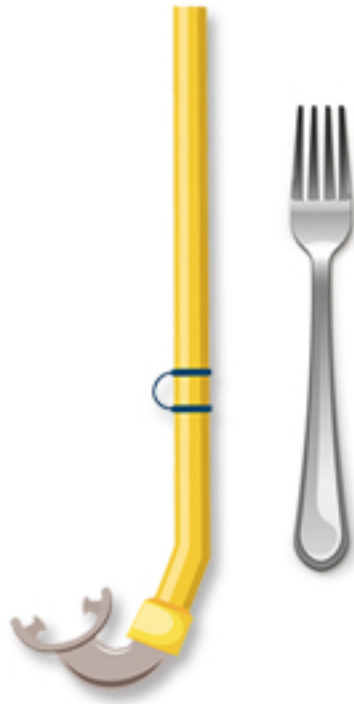


SnorkelFork



The title is confusing.
Your church's announcements don't have to be.

Adam McLaughlin
stageannouncements.com



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Is there hope for our stage announcements?

What inspires a guy to write an entire blog and ebook about your church's stage announcements? I have realized that stage announcements are not a necessary evil, but a communications opportunity.

In the business world, it would be a dream come true to have the opportunity, even for just a few minutes, to have all of your clients attention at one time every week to communicate information.

In the church world, we have that opportunity with our people during stage announcements, but we often waste it by reading an emotionless list of events with the same level of energy and enthusiasm that we'd use to read a grocery list, instead of capturing everyone's attention and inspiring a response.

I've realized that announcements aren't a time to list what's going on, but an opportunity for me to play my part in moving forward the communication strategies and culture we're creating as a church. Announcements are an opportunity for the people – some who have been a part of our church for 30 years and some who have been here for 30 minutes - to learn or be reminded of what Life Church is all about, from a voice other than our Pastor, and learn about new ways to get connected.

Your stage announcements could be exactly what someone needs to hear to get connected outside of your regular weekend service to build friendships and grow in their relationship with Jesus. For that person, your presentation makes all the difference.

The complaints I frequently hear from church communications teams often boil down to this: People don't respond to our announcements.

Rather than writing off the potential in announcements, I've found some strategies that have increased the responses we're seeing. if you adopt these ideas...

...your stage announcements can inspire a response!

Preparation

We realize that, in this day and age, attention is at a premium. And if we try to make everything important, then nothing will come across as important. When you go to a restaurant, they often have sections of their menu that list certain category of food like sandwiches, salads, pasta or side dishes. Within those sections, there is usually a picture of one or two of those items. These pictures haven't been selected at random, but are the 'important' items, usually the most profitable items for the restaurant, and are ordered far more frequently than the items without pictures.

Our brain associates the items with pictures as being important.

Now imagine a restaurant menu that was all pictures. You have to imagine it because there aren't many around. Why? Because, if everything falls under the 'important' category, then not one thing gets communicated as important, and the restaurant can no longer subtly suggest you purchase their most-profitable items.

The same is true with our stage announcements at church. If you try to announce everything, then nothing stands out as important.

We ask 3 questions when determining what gets announced during a service:

Do we have less than 5 things to announce this service?

Does this announcement apply to at least 75% of our people?

Is this something new?

Preparation:

Our 5 Announcement Slots

We have 5 announcement slots in a service. 3 are in the middle of service (considered our announcement time), 1 when the speaker gets up to transition to the sermon and 1 at the end as we close the service.

Our closing slot is reserved for direct-response announcements, ie. "Stop by the information center to sign up for..." OR "As you're leaving today, the ushers will hand you XYZ" OR "Remember, we have a special service this Wednesday...", etc,

Here's why:

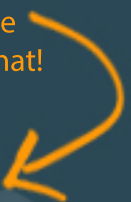
My wife and I have a rule that if I go to the grocery store to pick up more than 3 things, I need a list. If I give someone 8 things to remember in the middle of a church service, they've most likely forgotten 6 of them by the time they've arrived at the buffet after church and the other 2 by Monday morning. If I give them 3 or 4 opportunities to remember something, and they can pick the one that applies to them, and there's a better chance that announcement will stick.

When our speaker transitions to their message, what they're announcing is sometimes a reinforcement of something in the announcements, and sometimes it's in addition to it, but they only mention 1 thing. We have a conversation before service starts to confirm what needs to be mentioned, if anything, before they begin their sermon.

So, what happens if we have more than 5 things to announce that apply to 75% or more people? We pick 5 and promote the others in a different way, because if everything is promoted as important, then nothing stands out as important.

I would rather have someone respond to 1 out of 3 things, than tune out during a list of 10 announcements.

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Don't treat your stage announcements like your church's only communication method. Use them intentionally!

Preparation:

Does it apply to 75% of our people?

Announcements that apply to 75% or more of the people sitting in the seats would include communication about service schedule changes, small groups that everyone can be a part of, guest speakers, or an upcoming church-wide event.

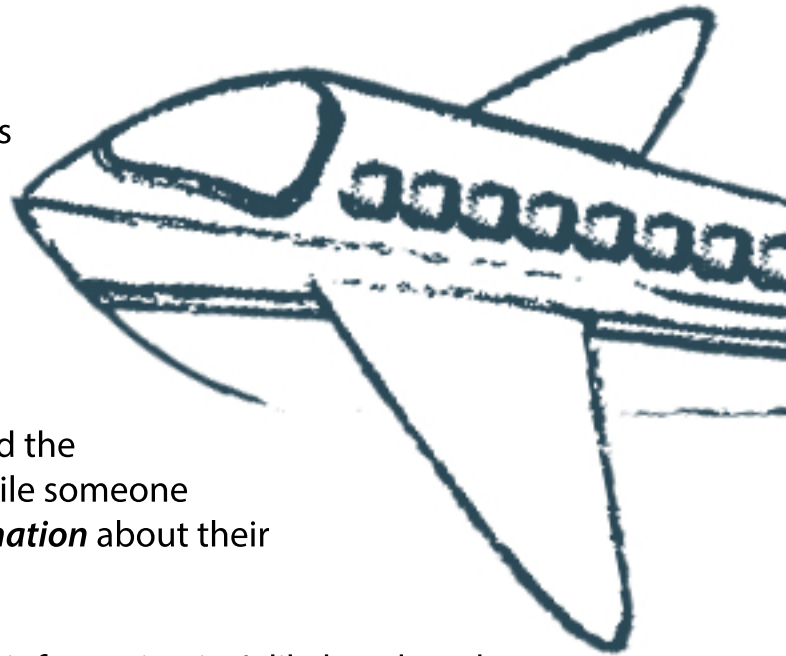
People will tune out if they don't think your information is relevant. Tuning out now could mean missing important information later. Keep their attention by keeping your announcements relevant.

As I'm writing this, I'm on an airplane.

The flight attendant is showing passengers who are already buckled in their seats how to do up their seatbelts while showing off a cardboard instruction manual that I've never seen anyone take time to read.

Why is the guy next to me nodding off, and the kid across the aisle playing on her iPad while someone is presenting potentially *life-saving information* about their floatation devices?

Because the audience has determined the information isn't likely to be relevant. Legally, the airline has to run through this procedure. In our churches, there's nothing legally binding about what we must include in our announcements.



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To get your listeners to respond to your announcements, you have to get and keep their attention. If you present irrelevant information, you'll lose their attention.

Preparation:

Does it apply to 75% of our people?

While I was visiting a church, they announced that there was going to be a meeting for a local community project that the church was highly involved with. I asked about the project and learned that the church only needed one representative, and the seat was filled. They announced it during service because that one person didn't check his email often and needed a reminder.

They justified announcing it because it kept the church's involvement in the community in people's minds, but remember: If you present irrelevant information, you'll lose your listeners' attention and reduce the likelihood they'll respond to future information that *is* relevant.

My approach would be to play a video recap during the service featuring our involvement in that project, or ask our speaker that day to talk about the progress being made. Then call the guy to remind him about the meeting, and remove that information from the announcements.

How often do you walk away or mute the TV when the commercials come on, and does that ever mean you miss a minute or two of the show you're actually wanting to watch because you shifted your attention? Now consider you're watching the show on Netflix. How many minutes do you miss because of muting the commercials? None.

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It's easier to keep attention you have than regain it later.

This 75% rule gives us some flexibility with what we announce. For instance, if we're hosting a women's conference, at face value, you could say that it only applies to half of our crowd. But, you could also make the case that some guys want to know about the event so they can make plans for that day – whether they will have the day to hang out with other guys, and whether the dads will need to be with their kids. From that perspective, we can make the case that it applies to more than 75% of people sitting in the seats.

Preparation: What's new?

If there's something new going on in our church, announcements are a great opportunity to talk about our core values, in light of something new going on.

For instance, we can remind people that our church has Life Groups because we value relationships while letting them know we have a new group being added to the schedule.

Even though a new home group that has a maximum capacity of 4 families doesn't apply to 75% or more, we have a variety of Life Groups available for everyone.

Through this announcement, we will be letting people know about the new Life Group, reminding them of our core values, and giving everyone an opportunity to get connected. Someone might not necessarily be interested in the new Life Group that is announced, but because they hear that our church has Life Groups, they may find one that they are interested in joining.

Another benefit is that it's recognition for our new Life Group leader and an encouragement for our existing Life Group leaders. It's a win for everyone.

Because our core values are central to everything we do, it's easy to make that connection and have the opportunity to remind our people about our core values and who we are.

Presentation

Stage announcements are public speaking. There are thousands of books, YouTube videos, and podcasts available to teach you how to address a crowd. There's no need for me to take time addressing that, but that doesn't mean it's not important. Take the time to invest in your presenting ability, practice ahead of time, and endeavor to move away from needing notes.

Think of your presentation like a slurpee cup. I don't buy a slurpee for the cup. The content is the important part, but the cup is necessary to deliver it.

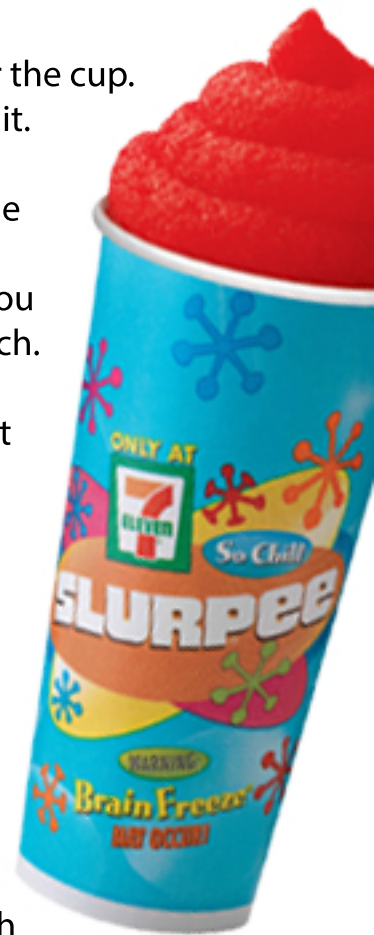
My presentation style is to crack a few jokes or tell a story, and then tie it into one of our announcements. I don't think this is a blanket solution for presenting so please don't hear me suggesting that for you and your church. Find an approach that works for you and your church.

This may take some conversation with your leaders to figure out what this looks like.

The first time I presented announcements, I took a risk with a joke. I knew my Pastor wouldn't have any concerns about me using a joke to drive home my point. He had told me to go ahead and take risks in my work, and we could talk about the results afterward and learn from them. However, I had only been a part of our church for a few months, and this was a public risk – what would the audience's response be?

Do they know me well enough to get my sense of humor? Will it catch them off guard to hear a joke during announcements? I was nervous. I had even planned a follow up comment if they didn't laugh at the joke so I didn't leave myself hanging.

Fortunately, my joke went well, and that set the expectation that I may say something off-the-wall when I present announcements. Now people pay attention when I get on stage because they don't want to miss anything. I don't get up on stage every week with a story or a joke, but I do use the strategies in the next few pages to present in a way that inspires a response.



Presentation:

Watch your words

Imagine you walk into your church and you've never been to church before in your life. You don't know the Christian words or understand the culture, but you end up loving the church.

You see a big sign on the way in that says "Auditorium" so it's pretty obvious where you need to go to sit. You love the music and how friendly everyone is and can't wait to come back next time.

Now, you're listening to the announcements and the presenter says "On Wednesday, we will have a Bible study in the sanctuary," so as you're leaving the auditorium, you look up at the way-finding signage at church. There's nothing that says 'Sanctuary'...

Having everyone use the same words and terms shows consistency, and consistency builds trust.

If you want someone to register for an event, then say, "Register at the information center". If you want them to sign up, then say, "Sign up...". Is there a difference? I don't know. BUT if you say, "Register..." in one announcement and, "Sign up..." for another announcement, does that suggest to the listener that there may be a difference?

Here are some common terms that you'll want everyone who presents from your stage to use consistently. Consider which one is right for your church, and which ones are specific to you, but aren't on this list. There's no right or wrong, but there is a benefit to consistency for the listener:

- Register / Sign Up / RSVP
- Guest / Visitor / First Time Attender
- Regulars / Members / Attenders
- Sanctuary / Worship Center / Auditorium
- Leader's Titles (ie. Pastor John or Pastor Smith, or just John, Elder / Deacon, or only their first name, or Mr. / Mrs. Last name)
- Other members are referred to as Brother _____ or Sister _____, or only by their first name, or Mr. / Mrs. Last name

Presentation:

Have a clear opener

Please, please, please Don't say, "Here are this week's announcements." That is the cue for people to check out. If you walk up on stage and people immediately pull out their phones to check their email or facebook, recognize that you're going to have to do something different than what you've done before to get and keep their attention in order to inspire a response.

Here are some ideas of what could work for your opener:

- "Good morning, church. Are you enjoying the weather today?" (You could follow up with a comment about how it is raining outside, or is hot, cold, or the perfect temperature.)
- "I have 3 things you'll want to mark on your calendar today."
- "When you leave today, you'll pass at the information center, and here's what you can do there."
- "If you're here with us for the first time, we're honored that you've chosen to worship with us today. Here's how you can get connected this week at our church."
- "I'd like to tell you a quick story this morning."
- Start with a testimony from your church family this week. Provide an email address where people can send in their testimonies to. Then, you can edit them down, make them anonymous, and read them next week.
- Play a 15-second audio clip as your theme or transition music.

What will be best for your church and will get your people's attention?

Have this conversation with your leaders. Be sure to match your church and leadership's style (not replicate, but match) to be sure that your announcements fit as part of your service and don't feel out-of-place, and also match your personality or it will come across as unnatural.

Presentation: Lead with your core values

I try to tie all of our announcements to one of our 4 core values – not in a way that sounds forced or contrived, but to make the connection for why we’re having this event.

At Life Church in Fort Myers, our core values are:

- The Presence of God
- Loving Relationships
- Team Ministry
- Multiplication



For example, if we’ve added some new Life Groups (small groups) to our schedule, we may take an opportunity to say:

“Here at Life Church, we value relationships, and one of the best ways to build relationships and meet other people that share your same interests is to join a Life Group. This week we’re launching a book club Life Group, but if reading isn’t your thing, stop by the information center in the foyer and see our full list of available groups.”

Another example: “We value Team Ministry, and we will be sending a team from our youth and their leaders to Peru this summer. To help them effectively reach people, we have a fund-raising golf tournament next month that we would like you to help us promote through your connections in the business community.... ”

Presentation: Tell me 'Why'

Even though you don't hear the other person's side of the conversation, every time you say something, the listener decides how to respond internally as if they were talking out loud.

Proof? You probably just responded internally to my previous statement.

Maybe you thought, "Yeah, that makes sense", or, "No, that's not true", or, "Maybe that's true for some people, but that can't be true for everyone."

If you thought any of those things, then it was true for you, and let me suggest that I believe this is true for every listener in any situation.

So when you're presenting, be aware that the other person is evaluating what you're saying and deciding if it applies to them.

In the business world, marketing professionals will often create a response as if the customer is asking, "What's in it for me?", or sometimes 'WIIFM' for short.

Why should I use this coupon? Why drive past a competitor to get to your business? Why should I give you my email address (to get this ebook, and an opportunity to hear more from me, or to improve how you can communicate your announcements, or to find out if this "Adam McLaughlin guy" actually knows what he's talking about).

In your church, your listeners are asking:

"Why would I go out on a Tuesday night and to do that?"

"Why is it important to sign-up today?"

"Why would I switch my Sunday morning routine to start attending our new Saturday night service?"

"Why does this announcement affect me, and how would I benefit from participating?"

Presentation:

A clear call to action

So you've got your listener's attention, you've lead with your values, they understand why your church is doing this event, then you've told them "what's in it for them", and now it's time for the final step – something too frequently overlooked – tell them how to respond with a single call to action.

This could be signing up at the information center, text this number, fill out the card on your seat or simply just 'show up' but choose and present only one.

Our church has pared down all of our call to actions to a single step. If it's something that requires attendance such as showing up for a special service, or our campus clean-up day next Saturday, then the call to action is, "See you tonight at 6pm", or, "See you next Saturday at 8am". If the event requires registration, we send them to one place - our information center.

Your listener will remember how to respond, and you can provide more information when they actually register like a flyer or a confirmation email.

Which are you more likely to remember if we are giving a call to action about a potluck next Saturday evening at 6pm?

- "Stop by the information center and pick up a flyer with all of the details."
- "It starts at 6pm, but doors open at 5:30pm. Everyone bring their own dish and serving spoons, but plates and forks will be provided. If your last name starts with A-L bring a main dish, M-P bring juice to share and Q-Z bring a dessert. Salad will be provided by our hosts, Bob and Sally, at 123 Main Street, Unit 7. Please park in the mall parking lot across the street, and RSVP by phone to either Sally at 555-1234 or Bob at 555-4321 by Thursday, or meet them in the entrance area after service today."

Which would give you the best information when you're trying to remember what to prepare on Friday and looking for Bob and Sally's house next Saturday? Give one clear call to action for each announcement.



Presentation:

A clear close

A clear close gives a clear indication to our listeners that we're transitioning, and a consistent and recognizable verbal cue to whoever is coming up on stage next (usually our speaker that day).

Please don't say, "That's all I've got, now here comes Pastor Bob."

When I hear something like this, I know you've said this because you realize you need a transition of some sort. You've recognized something important, but instead, use this moment that you have to say something meaningful that provides value to the listener AND will be the cue to the next person coming on stage.

My approach is to give a clear catch-all response as my close. Knowing that we only have 5 announcement slots, there is always something going on that hasn't been announced from the stage, so here is my close (watch how I break my rule and give 2 ways to respond):

"For more information about these and other events coming up at Life Church, stop by the information center in the foyer, or visit us online at lifechurch.net"

This is our close every time. I give 2 ways to respond because, while my preference is to have them stop by the information center in the foyer, I recognize that some people will get distracted when they decide to start talking with a friend, pick up their kids from their class, and realize after they've left church, that they need to sign up for something.

During the week, they'll be able to access our website and get the information they need for those events.

Announcing something from the stage isn't enough. Use the other communication tools you have in your toolbox to reinforce the message.

Leading up to your event, find new and creative ways to talk about what's coming up on social media, church bulletins, email newsletters, text messages, app notifications, church signage, and any other means you have available to you. Don't just broadcast the 'event details' but focus on the 'WHY', especially on social media.

Your announcements happen during a church service, but that information needs to continue to resonate in different ways. Show up to a Life Group to make a facebook LIVE video, or present a recap of your outreach team and use it to invite people to your next event, or record your baptism and use it as a reminder of when the next baptism service will be.

If you plan to announce an event in each service for a few weeks leading up to the event, change how you announce it each time. One time, you could have a story that ties into your announcement. Next week, have someone who is participating in the event give the announcement and communicate why the event is happening, or show some pictures from the last time you had this event so your listeners can get an idea of to expect.

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The Church Communication Formula:
Communicate. Repeat. Repeat.

Announcement Worksheet (complete 1 for each announcement):

The announcement is about : _____

Do we have 5 or less announcements this week? YES / NO

Does it apply to 75% or more of our people? YES / NO

Is it something new that haven't announced before? YES / NO

Our core value that it best relates to is: _____

What's the "why" that would make some respond? How will this benefit them?

What is the single call to action : _____

What is the necessary information that has to be included to point someone to the call to action?

Assemble your announcement. Keep it to 3 or 4 sentences: Tell about the event and tie it to a core value. Give the 'why'. Give necessary information. Give the call to Action:

About Me

Born and raised in Ontario, Canada, I moved to Life Church in Fort Myers, Florida in 2015 where I oversee marketing and communications.

I would love to hear how this ebook is helping you to inspire a response with your announcements, or discuss having me speak at your next conference or event.

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Let's connect (click below):

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