

# The art and spirit of communication

by Mel Lawrenz

The word “communication” comes from a Latin root meaning “to share.” This ties in nicely to the biblical ideal of *koinonia*, fellowship, which is “the shared life.” The aim of communication within the church or other Christian organization and outside it should be “the shared life.” It is not just about passing on information about what programs meet on what days and in what rooms—although communication as “the shared life” certainly includes clear information transmission. Communication is not just about letting people know about changes that will affect them—although it includes that, too. Good communication includes the facts and the figures, the whys, wheres, and what-for’s—but it goes on to link people with people, lives with lives. Communication is how human beings connect with other human beings. Communication is about knowing people, knowing the heart of the leaders, knowing the pain and struggles of people, knowing the vision, knowing the successes of each other, and knowing the failures, too. Communication is the ligaments and sinews that hold a body together. Or you can think of communication as the circulatory system of a body. The blood vessels large and small are the passageway for life-giving oxygen-enriched blood to get to every bit of tissue in every part of the body. Cut off the blood, however, (choke the communication), and the body’s tissues die.

Because communication is such a make-or-break issue for any church or other organization, I ask leaders from other churches about their successes and failures in communication all the time. I suppose I’ve asked dozens of leaders in different churches about how they feel they are doing in the area of communication, and I’m always amazed at the response I get. I’ve talked to the leaders of some of the best-known churches in the country, and what I hear from them, and from everyone else is this: they are not at all satisfied with how they are doing with communication.

Now that could be very discouraging, or it could simply be one more indication of how important and complicated communication is. Put it another way: if we ever catch ourselves feeling entirely satisfied with our communication, we probably have settled for something that is less than what God has called us to. We should not be afraid of our dissatisfaction with communication: it is our best indicator that we realize how important the shared life is.

Looming behind the issue of communication is a value question: the issue of motive. Every leader has to ask himself or herself: is my motive in what I communicate and how I communicate in my church an honest description of what is true?

The highest currency in any church community is trust. And the way trust is earned is through decent motives, reflected in honest communication. What that means is that a congregation knows that when it hears something from its leader(s) it is not spin, not slyness, and certainly not deception. The congregation knows that at the top of the values of the church’s leadership is truth, and so when it hears a message from the leadership, it trusts that there is no ulterior motive behind the words. Take that stance for a long time (years, or decades), and a trust-relationship between congregation and leaders is built-up that becomes foundational for the community.