

Our Lady of Lourdes Communications Standard Operating Procedure

Our Lady of Lourdes (OLOL) has many groups and ministries that need to pass on information regarding events, edification, and volunteering. We realize that these items must be publicized to reach the intended audience. We acknowledge that people need to hear and see things multiple times to retain information; however, there are limitations as to how many publications we can include in our various mediums each week. It is important to note that it is possible to over communicate to the point of turning off the audience and wasting money. To this end, we recommend that submitters provide content for multiple mediums they feel best serve their purposes using the following guidelines and strategies.

Please note that all content in any medium is subject to grammar, sentence structure, and style editing based on the Our Lady of Lourdes Style Guide without notice to or acceptance of changes by the author. Large additions, deletions, or changes due to space constraints or marketing effectiveness will be given back to the author for approval.

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Website

The OLOL website is the hub to all parish communications. All communication should be connected to, drive people towards, and be posted on the website, although there may be a few exceptions. The fact is that you are essentially creating a marketing campaign for most of the information your parish is putting out there; moreover, not every platform will be used for every campaign, but 99% of the time it should end up on our website.

Creating content for a website is not as simple as just putting your information in the bulletin or on a flyer and then expecting the same content to be posted on our website verbatim. **In fact, the promotion of your ministry or event should start with the website.** Then create flyers, bulletin submissions, social media posts, and/or other communication mediums with highlights from the website and encouraging people to go to the website to glean more details. Website pages provide a lot of space for details, stories, pictures, and links to additional information.

Details: Date, time, place, and action items (coming to an event, turning in a form, etc.).

Stories: Go beyond just the basic details. Stories engage readers and their emotions. They do not have to be long, either. Sometimes it just needs to be enough to introduce the action items. When creating content, churches have a tendency to focus on the things but often neglect the why. If your website content is full of “when” and “where” information only, you are missing a great opportunity to share your ministry’s or event’s story with the “why” behind the information. If possible, include stories from involved parishioners. This will help visitors make an emotional connection with the message OLOL is delivering.

Pictures: Make sure the pictures are legally usable and has the permission of anyone pictured to be used. The webmaster can guide you through this process or choose pictures for you.

Links: Connect people to downloadable pdfs to print or gather more information; links to other websites where people can learn more about the subject; and links to other pages within the website, if needed.

The OLOL webmaster does not create this content but will format it on the website using website design standards geared towards how webpages are read. The person or group requesting a post on the website must submit content for a specific page or request a new page. Submissions for our website should be written with the above concepts in mind and clearly requested to go on the website. We are also aware that our community has a sizable number of people who do not use or do not have access to the Internet, most of which are of a particular senior age. If your target audience fits this demographic, prepare your other forms of media accordingly.

Submission timeline:

Content for the website can be posted at any time as there are no space restrictions. One exception is the graphics slider on the home page. The number of slides is limited to six. Most slides will not be posted more than one month before the event.

Bulletins

The bulletin is limited in space and always in demand as it is the one constant item placed in people's hands after Mass. Bulletin content should be short details and action items (see the Website section), including direction to our website for further information. OLOL content will always take precedence over outside requests. Please limit submissions to around 50 words, unless you are writing for a section like Spotlight, which holds about 250 words.

Submission timeline:

All content should be submitted 10 days prior to the weekend it is to be published. For example, if the bulletin is distributed on the 22nd and 23rd of the month, all content should be submitted by the 12th of the month. Holidays and vacations can accelerate content deadlines, especially during Advent, Lent, and the summer. Check with your staff representative to your ministry or event, or the bulletin manager for these exceptions to the regular deadline. Remember that space is limited and is given on a first come, first serve basis with priority to OLOL content. It is best to request space and submit content as early as possible.

Bulletin Inserts/Flyers

Full page inserts can fall under two forms: event showcase information and supplemental page of content.

Event showcase information: These should be simple, eye-catching, and graphically sound. If possible, it is recommended that event flyers be created and submitted in Microsoft Publisher. If the author does not have access to Publisher, then Microsoft Word is acceptable. Flyers can be sent as a PDF file if that is all that is available.

Color flyers are encouraged as all inserts are emailed to subscribers and attached to the electronic version of the bulletin on our website. We can convert to black and white unless the graphics convert to a large, dark splotch. Please review how the flyer looks in black and white before submission. If the converted graphics are splotchy, please submit a second version in black and white or request a full color flyer at a small additional cost. You may also choose to only submit a black and white version.

Supplemental page of content: This type of insert can take the form of a letter, essay, story, or other document form that contains a large amount of information. Its purpose is to convey a large message that cannot fit into the regular sections of the bulletin and are not easily accessible on the Internet or our website.

Submission timeline:

Inserts are limited to two per week. We have learned that having more than two flyers in a bulletin can be overwhelming to readers and in turn they may ignore all of the inserts. To this end, you may schedule a flyer as far in advance as you want, but it is recommended not to be published more than a month out from the event.

Pulpit Announcements

Pulpit announcements are short bits of information given at the end of Mass. They should be intended for all people attending the liturgy, not just a specific group, kept to two or three sentences, and have a specific action to that weekend after Mass or a Monday deadline (with some exceptions for major events). For our pulpit announcements to be effective, we must limit the number included, or we risk losing the listeners' attention; therefore, last minute submissions may not make it into the pulpit announcements.

Submission timeline:

Submit announcements at any time before the Wednesday prior to the weekend, either in the body of an email, or in Microsoft Word (or written if you do not have access to a computer) to the director of communications. Again, announcements should only be scheduled for action items happening that weekend or the upcoming week.

Stewardship Mailing and Bulk Mailings

This is an important form of traditional communication for any parish. Generally information is provided regularly to each family household. Often it may be in the form of a newsletter, flyers, letter, or stewardship forms. It is the surest way for the parish to distribute information that it wants everyone to know about. There are two important things to note. First, not everyone reads these mailings. Statistically, younger generations would prefer to read this information in their email inbox or in some other form on a screen. Paper for some of them is clutter and sometimes is automatically thrown out without being read. Second, not every piece of information is intended for such a wide audience. If there are items that don't pertain to every household, consider more focused forms of dissemination. The paper, ink, number of envelopes, and possibly additional weight to the mailing costs money that inevitably will have no return. Take the time to determine who your audience is and decide whether traditional mailing, bulk email, or a combined version is the best course of action.

The stewardship mailing is a monthly publication that is sent by traditional mail or email to all parishioners. Although the main letter is written by a staff member, events and ministries can be promoted through this mailing. These inserts should follow the publication guidelines under the event showcase information section of Bulletin Inserts. If there are more than two additional inserts, event flyers may be condensed to a half or quarter page to save paper. A quarter page template can be supplied, if needed.

Submission timeline:

All stewardship mailing submissions are due to the director of communications two Mondays before the second Thursday of the month.

Social Media

Each form of social media carries its own guidelines to get a message out effectively. For example, posting to Facebook should happen daily, but only once or twice each day. On average Facebook users follow hundreds of different pages and don't want their newsfeeds dominated by one person or group. In contrast, Twitter posting should happen daily, as often as possible, and sometimes more than once depending on the importance of the tweet. Twitter is a constant feed of opinions and information. Unless someone posts something that trends, a post probably has a five minute window to be seen based on the average number of accounts people follow. In other words, there is no one way to do social media. In addition, the look and functionality of each brand of social media is constantly changing, so it is wise to understand how they work in order to create the best posts for the event or message being communicated.

Although the daily operation of different social media forms vary greatly, there are two common principles – know your audience and know the mission. At Our Lady of Lourdes, we currently use Facebook and Twitter. Our Facebook page is primarily followed by parishioners and people interested in what is happening at OLOL, such as the festival and Oktoberfest. We post twice a day but will add more posts in a day if the occasion warrants (weather closing, special announcement, time sensitive information, etc.). The mission of our Facebook page is to inform followers about happenings at OLOL and inspire them to live out their faith. Three days a week are dedicated to inspirational posts. The other four days are used to pass on event and ministry info, plus parishioner reflections, if they have been published in our bulletin. (Because our bulletin website page is one of our top five accessed pages, we consider the reflection as being posted on our website.) Our Twitter audience is more organizations than people. As we don't have a person solely dedicated to social media coordination, we make daily tweets and retweets when time allows, primarily Monday through Friday. Our Twitter mission is to be positive and inspirational. We regularly retweet most posts from the pope, USCCB, and archdiocese. We try to find uplifting story links and motivating quotes that show the Kingdom of God in action.

Submission timeline:

Requests for posts can be made to the director of communications at any time.

App

Our parish mobile app is available for Apple and Android operating systems. There are two major ways information is passed on to those who have downloaded the app: home page buttons and group push notifications.

Home page buttons: These are touch responsive graphics on the app home page. The first 11 options are permanent features to the app. Although we can edit the information connected to these buttons, they cannot be removed or reordered from our control screen. We are able to add additional buttons that are directly connected to a URL address. To avoid an overwhelming number of buttons, we have limited button availability to only major ministries and events (GIFT, Discipleship Institute, festival, Oktoberfest, seasonal prayer pages, etc.). Button creation is left to the discretion of the Director of communications.

Group push notifications: These are short messages (200 character limit) that will pop up on people's devices, even while they are in sleep mode. Although there is a general group that sends messages to all app subscribers, we also have the availability to send messages to specific groups. Users are able to choose which groups they want to receive messages from and which ones they don't. The creation of a push notification group is open to any ministry or event. It is important to remember the audience is anyone who has downloaded the app; therefore, push notifications are not meant for private messaging. If you are requesting a new group, it is recommended that you allow time for OLOL to publicize the creation of the group before send out your first push notification. Note: The general group is reserved for major announcements such as closings due to inclement weather. Ministry, group, and event specific messages will only be sent through group notifications.

Submission timeline:

Requests for push notifications can be made to the Director of communications at any time via email and must include the date of needed publication. Messages must be kept to 200 characters or fewer.

Lobby Screen

The Lobby screen for all intents and purposes is an electronic billboard for the parish. Each slide is visible for 10 seconds at a time on a constant loop. Slides on the screen are not meant to carry much detail. Information should be basic action items (event name, date, and time), and can include a catch phrase, website address, or registration info. Images to be displayed can be submitted, but the Communications Director will graphically design the slide and find images if no images are submitted.

Submission timeline:

Requests for slides can be made to the Director of communications at any time.

Bulletin Boards

All bulletin boards are ministry and group specific. Each board has a person in charge of content. Bulletin boards are used to convey information on various topics and events in the parish. Their “look” should be considered part of the environment of the building and should be treated as such. If the boards are drab, outdated, or chaotic in appearance, people will not look to them as a source of information, and their boring appearance conveys apathy. Boards that are creative, imaginative, in sync with the Church calendar, and up to date will draw attention to the information they hold and feel welcoming.

Some things to keep in mind:

- **Have a focus** – this will help people easily find information they want to know about.
- **Keep it updated** – keep track of event dates and pull down the postings when they are past. Take down anything that is faded or looks old. Change themes, pictures, background, and borders regularly to continue to draw interest.
- **Be judicious** – not every poster, flyer, booklet, or display needs to be posted on every board, or in some cases, any board. Pay attention to the focus of the board.
- **Be creative!**
- **Don’t get complicated, cluttered, or overthink it.**

Submission timeline:

Requests for bulletin board content must be made to the person in charge of that board. Requests for flyers to be placed in the door acrylic holders, and large door signs must be made to Director of communications. Any postings without the knowledge of the person in charge of that area will be taken down.

Bulk Email and E-Newsletters

Bulk emails are emails that are sent out to a large number of recipients at one time. Often these are used to communicate information to an entire congregation electronically. Usually some version of software is incorporated to send bulk emails without address limits, prevent spam filters from kicking in, and to keep email addresses private from all other receivers. There are a few companies that will provide this service for a fee but will include templates for newsletters, flyers, and any other announcement you might need to broadcast to the entire parish. The biggest benefit can be in savings on postage, paper, ink, and usage of your photocopier. Beyond financial gains, these software options can embed the document into the body of the email and also track if people are opening and reading your emails letting you know how effective your efforts are – not something you can accomplish with “snail mail.”

E-newsletters are a powerful way to broadcast information to a wide audience using bulk email. This media stream can also help keep parishioners up to date on happenings that are specific to their interests (youth ministry, young adult ministry, lectors, servers, choirs, etc.), communicate save the date info before a full promotion campaign would start, convey what has happened during past events, highlight people from the parish to the community, share reflections on various topics and seasons within the Church calendar, plus any other application that can be imagined; the sky’s the limit.

Lastly, helpful links can be embedded into the e-newsletters to share information that wouldn’t be possible using paper or would need a lot of extra paper. For example, if you want your group to see the latest edition of the [Catholic Update published by Franciscan Media](#). Instead of ordering a bunch of newsletters and mailing them out, post a link in your e-newsletter so your audience can read it online. You could also embed links to videos as well.

Of course, for any of these options to work, you must harvest email addresses and keep them up to date. If you haven’t started a method to collect this electronic gold, get going. **Well above 90% of all Internet users, no matter what age range, use email.**

Submission timeline:

Requests for bulk emails can be made at any time to the Director of communications. Content should be accompanied with a list of email addresses in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Outdoor Sign

The OLOL outdoor sign is an electronic billboard. The audience is the general public driving in cars. Any slide that goes on the sign can only be for public invitation and consumption such as events like the festival, Oktoberfest, and Mass times.

Submission timeline:

Requests for slides can be made to the Director of communications at any time.