

# Using Multiple Media in Church

A workshop by Mark Illingworth

The use of “multimedia” is all the rage in today’s culture. You can sometimes think that if you don’t have a data projector then, well, you’re still back in the 20th Century. However, using multiple media shouldn’t be limited to just “multimedia”. As humans we have more senses than just seeing and hearing, so why limit using media to connecting with just those senses?



Consider our 5 physical senses – seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling – “church” tends to be dominated by media that connects with ears. Occasionally we use a little bread and wine (tasting and smelling) and also some action “sharing the peace” (touching) – but usually we are limited to watching and listening to a talking head.

Yet, over the centuries the Church has used a wide variety of media to convey the all important message of Jesus, the Son of God, Saviour and Lord of all. Music, statues and pictures (icons), dramas and preaching have all played their part. As Paul states, “*I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy it’s blessings*” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, NLT)



Consider the statement “You can’t over communicate”. When is this true? When is this false?

Given the importance of the message “*The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from yours sins and believe this Good News!*” (Mark 1:15, NLT) it is unlikely that it can be over communicated PROVIDED multiple ways (media) are used to convey the message.

Jesus demonstrates this multiple media approach to communication in the way that he varies his style of spoken word (eg contemporary parables, pertinent questions, Old Testament quotations, direct teaching) and through his actions (eg washing disciples feet, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection). Jesus does not allow himself to be confined to a single location (ie a building), a certain style (eg preaching or social action or meditation) or a homogeneous audience (eg fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, lecturers). He melds it all together providing a rich tapestry of communication that connects in some way with everybody.



Consider first your congregation then your local community. Do people read books, watch movies, play sport, go for walks? What are their hobbies? Are they inside or outside people? What sort of houses do they live in? What style of clothes do they wear? What jobs do they do?

The point is that a communication approach that ONLY uses the voice of a preacher does not connect with everyone. The use of multiple media is a strategic way to ensure that the message connects with as many people as possible. Understanding the variety within your congregation will increase the probability that an appropriate combination of media will succeed in impacting many rather than just a few.

When more than one medium is utilized, the combination is referred to as the “media mix.” The net effect, in turn, is synergistic, the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. Everyone benefits from the variety. The exact form that such a mix should take obviously varies substantially from one congregation to the next.

Does multiple media work? Ask the average Australian what they know about Christianity and you most likely will get some reference to the Christmas and Easter events. Why? Because the Church uses a multiple media approach during these special events. But what about the other 50 Sundays of the year?

## Resources and ideas for multiple media in the Church

### **Idea 1 “Video”**

In 2005 the Revised Common Lectionary focuses on the Gospel of Matthew. Use a copy of The Visual Bible (Word for word video dramatisation of the NIV bible translation) to show the bible reading on a TV/Projector instead of having it read. Video is a powerful medium and although most Australians watch excessive amounts, it is a good way to connect with those who don't tend to read.

### **Idea 2 “Puppets”**

Announcements usually repeat what is in the news bulletin – which is a good example of using speech and the written word to communicate information. Why not spice it up using puppets to do the announcements. Involve kids (10 year olds and up!) to be the puppeteers reading a prepared script. Puppets are great communicators. They can say things that “humans” can't get away with! Most people enjoy puppets.

### **Idea 3 “Music”**

Music is a universal language, but we all have preferred styles. The use of different instruments is always a good idea. Increase involvement of everyone by using home made shakers when singing upbeat songs. Also don't forget to do congregational singing without accompaniment (except for getting the starting note!). Acapella singing can be awesome! And don't forget Compact Discs. Most people have collections at home and with a bit of searching, great music can be found to enhance parts of the gathering – including arriving, meditation and dismissals.

### **Idea 4 “Drama”**

Drama is always fun. Either dramatising the bible reading or doing a send up of the theme. While serious dramas are good, comedies have a wider appreciation and tend to lighten the formal mood that tends to descend on church gatherings. Check out the gifts of members – maybe there is a hidden script writer!!

### **Idea 5 “Handouts”**

Fill in the blanks sermon outlines can be a useful way to give people an idea of where the preaching is going. Make sure there are enough pencils available and that the preacher clearly points out what the “answers” are! This idea requires the preacher to have their outline prepared early enough to be modified and photocopied.

### **Idea 6 “Hospitality”**

Food and drink are an essential part of every culture for making people feel valued and welcome. Today students at school are encouraged to bring their water bottles and “brain food” into class to enhance learning. So how about serving a cuppa to people on arrival? And don't limit it to cheap tea and coffee. Buy the stuff people drink at home! Have a coffee percolator running to give off the great smell. And include other beverages like milo, cordial and cold water for those with “other” tastes!

### **Idea 7 “Sticks and Stones”**

Churches often use palm branches and mother's day flowers, why not other tactile objects? Hand out rocks for people to hold when teaching on faith (ie Peter the Rock) or set up tents when teaching about the Festival of Tabernacles.

### **Idea 8 “Smells”**

This is definitely one to be used subtly otherwise there will be a mass exodus of those with sensitive noses! Invite people to write their confessions on a piece of paper and then burn them in a pot outside with a little incense. “And their prayers rise to the heavens like incense”

### **Idea 9 “Icebreakers”**

These are usually used extensively in small groups but need not be limited to them. Icebreakers tend to be a short activity that people do to encourage talking and acting. In a large group, “passing the peace” acts like an icebreaker and might be more useful early in the gathering rather than later. Try variations on the standard words and/or handshake to keep this activity meaningful and alive.

### **Idea 10 “Multimedia”**

This is more than just having a data projector and a computer. You will also need someone willing to devote the time to preparing the material (eg using PowerPoint) and ensuring it works smoothly on the day. Check out the South Australian UCA website [www.missionresourcing.net.au/](http://www.missionresourcing.net.au/) and click on Multimedia for more helps in this area.

