

## Parish Communications

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# *Forming a Champion: A Short Guide for the Priest*

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### A SHORT GUIDE FOR THE PRIEST

*For use in the days before you commission a Communications Champion in your parish. Read slowly, perhaps more than once.*

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#### PAGE 1: THE BAPTISMAL GROUNDING

Father,

you are about to commission a person in your parish to a ministry. You may not have thought of it in those terms yet. You may have thought of it as "asking Mary to run the parish Facebook page" or "giving the parish secretary more formal authority over communications." Those are the practical descriptions. The theological description is different, and it is worth sitting with for a few minutes before you have the conversation.

By baptism, every Christian is incorporated into Christ and shares in his priestly, prophetic, and kingly office. This is not metaphor. It is the teaching of the Church, rooted in scripture, unfolded over centuries, and made explicit again at Vatican II. The person you are about to commission already has this apostolate. You are not granting it. You are naming it, supporting it, and asking her to exercise it in a specific way in this parish at this time.

This changes the register of what you are about to do.

You are not a manager delegating a task. You are a shepherd recognising a gift the Spirit has placed in your flock, and asking the person who carries that gift to use it for the good of the whole. The weight of that is different from the weight of a volunteer rota.

It also changes what you can reasonably ask of her. A person commissioned to a ministry deserves more than a nomination and a quick handshake. She deserves your attention, your support, your willingness to protect her from the work piling up on her shoulders, and your prayer. She deserves to be commissioned, not just assigned.

You do not need to make the theological grounding explicit in your conversation with her (although you can, if she would welcome it). What matters is that you approach the conversation having sat with the grounding yourself. The posture you bring is what she will feel, whether or not the words are said.

Take a few minutes, before reading on, to sit with this: *the person I am about to commission already shares in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, by virtue of her baptism. My work today is to honour that.*

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PAGE 2: THE SPECIFIC PRAYER

If you are inclined to pray with her at the commissioning, or to pray privately beforehand, the prayer below is offered for your use. It is written to be prayed aloud at a Mass, or quietly in the parish office, or privately in your own chapel. Adapt the wording to your own voice and to the specific ministry she is being commissioned to.

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*A prayer of commissioning*

Loving Father,

you have called [name] by baptism into the life of your Son and the fellowship of his Body, the Church. In her you have placed a gift of attention and care, which we recognise now and ask you to sanctify for the work of parish communication.

May she be strengthened in hesitance and courage, in pastoral love and in honest speech, in service of your Gospel in this place.

Protect her from the temptation to carry more than she should. Give her the wisdom to know what to say, the courage to say it, and the humility to know when silence serves you better.

Let her work, seen or unseen, bear fruit in the building up of this parish for the glory of your name.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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If you prefer a shorter form, or a spontaneous prayer in your own words, that is equally fitting. What matters is that the commissioning is blessed in some form. A role sanctified at its beginning is a role carried with different weight.

If she is not a person who would welcome explicit prayer at the commissioning moment, you can pray this privately before the meeting. The effect on her, and on you, is the same.

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PAGE 3: WHAT YOU PROMISE, AND WHAT YOU DO NOT

A commissioning is a mutual commitment. You are asking her to take up a ministry. She is saying yes. But yes to what, exactly? This page is for you to be honest with yourself, before the conversation, about what you can and cannot offer her.

**What you are promising**

**Your attention.** Not daily, not weekly necessarily, but regularly. You will check in with her, briefly, in the first month and the first season. You will not commission her and then disappear.

**Air cover from scope creep.** When a parishioner approaches her with "can you just..." requests that fall outside her remit, you will intercept. You will say, on her behalf, that the request can be brought to you

or to the parish secretary first. You will protect her from becoming the default catch-all for every parish communications need.

**Regular review.** The first review at six months. Annual review thereafter. You will put these dates in your calendar now, not notionally. These reviews are pastoral check-ins, not performance evaluations. They are your commitment to keep the role honest over time.

**Pastoral care of the person, not just the role.** If she is struggling, if her family circumstances change, if she is tired, you will notice and you will ask. You will not treat her as staff.

**Support for her editorial authority.** When she declines or reworks a submission, you will back her judgment unless there is a specific and important reason not to. You will not undermine her by overriding casually. When you do need to override, you will do it in private, with respect, and with an explanation.

### What you are not promising

**That this will be easy.** It will not. Parish communications is hard work, done under pressure, usually with insufficient resources.

**That she will always agree with your editorial judgments.** She will not. Sometimes she will be right, and you will need to change your mind. Sometimes you will be right, and she will need to accept your call. Both will happen.

**That you will always respond immediately.** You have other work. You are a parish priest, not a communications manager. You will try to respond in good time, but the nature of parish life is that pastoral emergencies will sometimes push communications matters down the queue. She needs to know this and accept it.

**That she will never feel overwhelmed.** She will. The role has natural moments of pressure, especially at high liturgical seasons and during parish crises. Your job is not to prevent the feeling; it is to help her carry it when it arrives.

**That the role will stay exactly the same.** It will not. The parish changes, the tools change, the liturgical year flows. The role will evolve. The annual review is the moment to name and adjust.

The honesty matters. Volunteers who have been over-promised leave. Volunteers who have been honestly prepared tend to stay much longer and carry much more.

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#### PAGE 4: WARNING SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

In the months and years after the commissioning, watch for these signs. They are not dramatic. They are small, easy to miss, and they appear before the champion herself names what is happening. Your attentiveness to them may be the single most important thing you do to protect her.

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**She has started apologising for small things.** Apologising for sending an email late. Apologising for a typo in the bulletin. Apologising for not getting to something you did not actually need. A Champion who is feeling unsupported often starts apologising as a way of pre-empting criticism she is afraid is coming.

*What to do:* thank her, specifically, for the thing she apologised about. Not generically. Name what she did well.

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**She is missing small deadlines she never used to miss.** Emails that used to be answered same-day now take three days. The bulletin is going out Friday afternoon instead of Friday morning. Nothing catastrophic. Just a slippage you notice.

*What to do:* ask how she is, not about the deadlines. The deadlines are symptom, not cause.

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**She has become quieter in meetings.** She used to contribute. Now she agrees to things without saying much, or she has stopped coming altogether. Silence in parish meetings is almost always communication.

*What to do:* call her before the next meeting and ask what she is thinking. She may tell you something she would not say in the meeting itself.

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**She is asking "is this okay?" repeatedly about work she used to do confidently.** The loss of confidence is a tell. Something has shaken her judgment, and she is seeking reassurance she used to not need.

*What to do:* affirm her judgment directly. "You know this work better than I do. Trust your call." Repeat this as often as necessary until her confidence returns.

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**She is mentioning family needs more often.** A mother's illness. A child's difficulty. A partner's stress. These mentions, repeated, often signal that she is being pulled in too many directions and the parish role is under quiet threat.

*What to do:* offer reduced scope, not encouragement to continue. "What would it take to make this role lighter for you this season?" is the right question. "I believe in you, keep going" is the wrong one.

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**She has withdrawn from other parts of parish life.** She used to stay for coffee after Mass. Now she leaves quickly. She used to volunteer for the social committee. Now she does not. The withdrawal is often the first visible sign of burnout.

*What to do:* notice, name, and ask. "I have missed seeing you at coffee. Is everything all right?"

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**Her submissions are becoming shorter, then stopping.** If she is also an originator, her own contributions may start to dry up. She is conserving energy. This is late-stage burnout and requires immediate pastoral attention.

*What to do:* sit down with her. Not a quick chat. A proper conversation. Consider whether the role needs to be reduced, shared, or temporarily paused.

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**The tone of her written communication has changed.** Warmth has been replaced by efficiency. Emails that used to include a human sentence now go straight to the task. This is often the earliest sign, and it is easy to miss because the efficiency looks like professionalism.

*What to do:* respond to her emails with a human sentence yourself, even when the subject is operational. Re-model the warmth.

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For each of these signs, the right response is pastoral rather than managerial. She is not under-performing. She is carrying something that has become too heavy, or something has happened in her life that is making the carrying harder. Your attentiveness is the difference between a Champion who serves the parish for a decade and one who quietly breaks at eighteen months.

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*One last thing.*

The ministry you are about to commission her to is not your ministry. It is hers, and it is the parish's, and ultimately it is the Holy Spirit's. Your role is to honour, support, and accompany. You will not do the work for her. You will not always understand it. You will sometimes be wrong about what she is doing and why.

Trust her. Pray for her. Check in with her. Thank her, specifically and often. And let her carry the work.

The parish is blessed by her gift. Your job is to bless it further by giving it room to flourish.

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*This guide is part of the Pillar 1 reflection library within the True Light Digital Formation framework. For the cornerstone essay on which it is based, see [truelight.digital/formation/communications-champion/](https://truelight.digital/formation/communications-champion/).*

*True Light Digital publishes these reflections as part of its free Formation library. If your parish would value support in building a wider communications system, please contact us at [sean@truelight.digital](mailto:sean@truelight.digital). If not, we hope this guide serves you well on its own. That is the goal.*

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