

IS THERE A PLACE FOR THE CHURCH MAGAZINE?

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As a young minister I once wrote an article for a national Christian monthly, in which I strongly urged my readers to “Scrap the church magazine”. “Church magazines”, I said, “are a waste of good paper – plus a good deal of time and effort”. I went on argue that it was a waste of time giving news in a church magazine, because by the time the magazine was published, the news would be old, and “old news doesn’t work”. Instead of a church magazine, I said, produce a weekly news bulletin. And as a man who practised what he preached, I encouraged my then church to scrap its monthly magazine and instead put all its energies into the production of a weekly news bulletin. But 20 years later I find that I have changed my mind. A major reason for this change of mind is that patterns of churchgoing have changed. People, for instance, are no longer so regular in their church attendance. 20 years ago ‘twicers’ were people who attended church morning and evening; today ‘twicers’ are people who attend twice a month. With increased affluence as well as increased holiday allowance, people are forever away, either on holiday or simply visiting friends & relations. It is therefore increasingly difficult on any given Sunday for ministers to address a particular message to the church: indeed, in our church it now takes us three Sundays to get over a message to the church as a whole. It is at this point that a monthly church magazine has a vital role to play: for through their monthly ‘letters’ ministers are speak to the church as a whole. I confess that at one stage I simply used to dash off the briefest of letters; now, however, conscious of the strategic value of the magazine, I take a good deal more effort, as I consider what particular issue is best to raise with my readers. Likewise, because of the changed pattern of church attendance, the church magazine becomes an important medium of news. True, the news it contains may not be the latest – but unless news is repeated three weeks running in the weekly news bulletin (and interestingly, I know of one church which does precisely that) a good deal of people miss out if news is confined to the weekly news bulletin. Another important feature of our church magazine is the church diary:, which this month covered five sides. In our church – and no doubt many others – there is so much going on in a month, that there is no way in which it can be dealt with in a weekly news bulletin. Then, of course, there all the other features: financial updates, missionary letters, reports from various organisations, expressions of view of one kind or another. Yes, the church magazine has a very real role to play – and the fact that so many are willing to pay for a copy is an indication of its felt value.

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