Bulletin Board Basics

by Melissa Woltmann

Bulletin boards are important in the ministry of the church. A bulletin board can set the tone in a classroom by highlighting important facts and thoughts for the lessons. A bulletin board imparts information to a congregation through announcements or by highlighting a particular season or event (missions conference, revival, homecoming, etc.) that may be coming up. A bulletin board helps establish enthusiasm in a church not only to the members but to those who visit. Visitors are able to see that something is "going on" in your church; this lets them know that your church is "alive" and not "dead". A bulletin board is a good way to share photos of events that happen in the church such as youth activities, homecoming, and the like. Contests are another great topic for a bulletin board especially when dealing with children.

If you have never had any experience with bulletin boards you may not know where to begin. Perhaps there are not any bulletin boards in your church; in many small churches this is true. So we will begin at the very beginning.

Building a Bulletin Board

Do not limit your church in the area of bulletin boards by thinking you cannot afford them. Yes, bulletin boards are very expensive, if you purchase them retail. However, if you make them yourself you can have what you need for your church. Construction is simple and the materials are available at most home centers and/or lumber yards.

Generally, a bulletin board is either 8' x 4' or 4' x 4'. (Yours could vary depending on your wall space; remember, build to suit.) You will need Homosote board (made of recycled material) or simple acoustic ceiling tiles (like those in grid ceilings). I would suggest mounting (liquid nails or other adhesive) the Homosote or ceiling tiles onto plywood of the same size as it may be too flexible for mounting on walls. Cut the board to size. Mount to the wall using the appropriate wall fasteners for your walls and washers; washers are necessary to avoid stripping through the Homosote or ceiling tiles. Once the board is on the wall, frame it in with molding and paint the frame to give a finished look.

Once the board is on the wall only your imagination will limit what you can do. There are a few guidelines to follow, however, when decorating a bulletin board to keep them professional looking and not cluttered and tacky.
**Background(s)**

- Teacher supply stores (also known as school supply centers) offer a tremendous variety of background papers and borders. Choose complimentary or contrasting colors/subjects based on the theme of your bulletin board. (If searching the internet or calling around, ask for bulletin board paper and bulletin board borders.)

- Wrapping paper and wall paper are other sources of background papers for bulletin boards.

- Be creative with paper. Create skies, oceans, mountains, etc. using torn paper in layers.

- Think outside the box occasionally and use newspaper to help focus your theme (comics, sports, etc.)

- Use fabrics to cover the background. Large rick-rack or ribbon would make great borders as well.

- Silk flowers, greenery and other objects can also be used as interesting borders and decoration. (Keep theme related.)

**Lettering**

- Lettering should be at least 2"; anything less is difficult to read; the size of the board should determine the size of the lettering. Larger letters are also fine, but do not use more than 6" unless there are only two or three words. Use very large letters for the title only or sparingly.

- Keep lettering simple. Every bulletin board needs to have some sort of message to direct the thought of the board. Have a "topic phrase" or title only in most cases.

- Teacher supply stores have pre-cut letters to help save time.

- To make your own letters take stencils found in any school supply section, trace lightly, connect gaps where necessary, and then cut out of construction paper.

- Use the same lettering style throughout the border. Times Roman or Gothic are typical of most styles used on bulletin boards, but don't limit yourself to these only. Vary as needed for your themes.

- Use your computer to create interesting fonts for your bulletin boards. Print onto a transparency to blow up on the background, then simply trace the letters with chalk for a unique look.
Tip: To cut centers out of letters such as "A", "O", etc. use an Exacto knife or carpet knife. Remember to use with caution.

Artwork

- Do not be afraid of the artwork. There are many ways to "cheat" in this area.
- Use calendar pictures to help create a cohesive theme.
- Coloring books are great sources of pictures to use for your bulletin boards. Keep pictures simple; too many details and lines will only cause problems when coloring.
- Suggested coloring books: Precious Moments, Angels on Assignment, "Dear God..." kids, and any coloring books that have simple people, objects or scenery.
  
  Tip: Many of these coloring books can be found in dollar stores.

- Clip art and cards are other terrific resources for pictures for your boards.
- Copy your pictures onto a transparency sheet (look in office supply stores for these). Remember to keep your pictures in black and white for best tracing. You can fit many small pictures onto one transparency. Consider reducing the pictures by a 1/4 or 1/8 (or smaller if there isn't a great deal of detail) of the sheet of paper to save on the transparency sheets. Pre-plan several boards and place all the artwork on one transparency.

- Using an overhead projector, blow up the picture to the desired size. Lightly trace the picture onto poster board or paper.
  
  Tip: Local libraries usually will allow churches to check out an overhead projector.

Tip: Crafters sometimes use a smaller version of the overhead projector (a.k.a. opaque projector); check with your local craft store to see if they have something similar for purchase.

- Use poster board for individual characters and objects. For large scenes you may want to consider tracing directly onto your background paper. You could also create backgrounds with different colored papers.

- Color your pictures using chalks (pastels). Markers can be used in very small projects but you will need to be mindful of streaking. Pastels come in a variety of colors and sets. They can be found at art stores or teacher supply stores as well as national chain craft stores in their art departments. (Paints do not do well on paper products and therefore should be used for projects
Chalks are easy to use and affords to ability to shade and blend colors for terrific effects.

Set chalk by lightly spraying your work with several fine coats of aerosol hair spray; the cheaper the hair spray the better. Be prepared for the colors to seem to brighten; this is normal.

Trace lines with a black permanent marker to give a coloring book effect.

Cut away excess paper. You can cut right along the lines or you can simply cut the picture into a large circle or oval.

If you have access to a large laminator, do laminate your work to protect it so it can be used again. Libraries sometimes have large laminators that you can use on premises; call to find out.

If you cannot locate a large laminator you can still protect your work using clear contact paper. Roll out enough contact paper to cover both front and back. When applying the contact paper, be careful of bubbles. Smooth them out carefully with an ice cream stick; use a pin to get the air out of the worst ones. Trim the excess contact paper; try to leave a 1/4 inch edge.

Themes/Topics

Choose themes that spotlight your lessons for a few weeks or a quarter.

Contests can be tracked on bulletin boards for kids. Track attendance, verse memorization or a number of other things through your bulletin boards.

Seasonal boards are great for general church information. A Christmas board can include the holiday events for the entire church or simply proclaim His birth.

Event boards can highlight information for an upcoming church event. A missions conference board can not only give basic information of when, where, and who but letters and pictures of the missionaries to be present would add interest.

Professionalism Tips

Your bulletin boards represent your church. Cluttered, disorganized and faded boards send a poor message to visitors.

Staples should all go the same way. All should be vertical or horizontal; do not mix.
• **Change bulletin boards at least once every quarter.** Boards used for announcements can keep the same background paper and borders for a few months but be mindful to change when obvious punch holes or fading begins to show.

• **Do not tape** anything to the background paper. Tape can fall or leave unsightly tears or stains.

• Avoid handwriting on bulletin boards. For theme boards, unless it is directly related to the theme such as writing to your missionaries, do not handwrite. Announcements should also be typed out instead of being handwritten.

**Tips and Tricks**

• Use plain straight pins to bring your lettering off the background for a 3-D effect. Stick the pins into the letter then the board. Bring the letter out the end of the pin to make it stand off the board.

• Create a shadow or highlight effect by layering black (white, yellow) letters under colored letters.

• Two dimensional boards are fine but once in awhile use simple objects to help create more dimension. For example, in a fishing scene add a simple net and small plastic fish.

• Scrap booking resources are a big help today in lay out, design, and ideas for bulletin boards. A bulletin board is simply a scrapbook page on a large scale and without the family pictures (but you could include activity pictures).

• Look to graphic design books for ideas to spruce up simple announcement boards. Layer papers or geometric objects to create interest.

• Make two 4’x4’ boards from one 8’x4’ board simply by dividing the board through the use of borders.

Bulletin boards will be a great asset to your ministry. People will become excited as they are focused in Sunday school on the upcoming lessons. The congregation will begin to unite and work as they see aspects of ministry they may not have been aware of before. Guests will be able to see an excited and thriving church they might want to join.

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