
GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

"But I have always held that he who bases his hopes on human nature is a fool, she who gives up in the face of circumstances is a coward and henceforth, the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions."

- Albert Camus

Christian Peacemaker Teams' members have shown that the strength of words can help defuse conflicts, promote understanding of human rights, and educate people about the potential power of nonviolence. Below are some guidelines for teams in preparing written materials for "consumption" by the growing network of CPT supporters, as well as other peace groups and, at times, mainstream and alternative media.

I. Maintaining a team "log book" and individual journals

These items often prove indispensable for constructing future reports and verifying facts. Teams should assign a daily log writer, perhaps on a rotating basis, keep the log book handy at all times, and encourage one another to take time for individual journal writing. The daily log should contain a general record of the day's activities. Unusual or significant events should be recorded in more detail. Individual journaling is also a good way to process the often intense experiences of team life and work.

II. Preparing written materials for CPT distribution

Think about the best audience and purpose for the piece. Send materials to CPT (P.O. Box 6508; Chicago, IL 60680; Tel: 773-277-0253; Fax: 773-277-0291; e-mail: peacemakers@cpt.org) and indicate your vision for distribution. The following questions may help:

A. Anecdote: Is this an anecdote that will lead to a prayer request? If so, go for brevity so that it can be included in a church homily, newsletter or bulletin (1 - 2 paragraphs).

B. Action Alert: Is this an action alert? If so, be sure to supply clear, concise information about the problem and the envisioned response. Include the 5 W's (what, where, when, who, why) plus a specific request. Give enough information so people feel confident responding but avoid extraneous details (250 words). (See guide: "WRITING AN ACTION ALERT").

C. Press Release: Is this a press release? If so, treat your story as a "breaking news" event and follow the disciplines required for a press release (see guide: "WRITING A PRESS RELEASE"). Try to limit the story to 300-500 words.

D. Human Rights Documentation: Is this a report of a human rights violation? If so, include eyewitness reports, names and addresses of victims and witnesses, exact times, dates and whereabouts of occurrences, photos if possible, and as much relevant background material as you can put together. (See guide: "DOCUMENTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES").

E. Feature Story: Is this a magazine feature story for submission to an alternative press publication? If so, be sure to notify the CPT office that you don't necessarily intend this for distribution on the CPT network, but would like some assistance in getting it out to suggested magazines or newsletters. Aim for 800-1200 words.

F. Group Specific: Is this correspondence directed to a specific group (e.g., a letter to a Sunday school class, congregation, etc.)? If so, be sure to notify the CPT office and also indicate whether or not you would recommend wider distribution.

G. Other: Many other types of writing have been submitted by team members, all of which can be quite useful. Examples include open letters to political authorities, poems, short stories, letters home, Scripture commentaries, project mission statements, statements of conviction, project updates/reports, and proposals for future projects.

III. Writing for CPTNet (CPT's e-mail network)

CPTNet is the primary tool for reporting on CPT's work in the field. Releases are distributed daily to a growing network of more than 2600 e-mail recipients. From there, our materials are often re-posted to other networks reaching thousands of people around the globe.

When writing for CPTNet, remember:

- **CPTNet reports on CPT work.** Its purpose is to tell the stories of the people to whom we are connected and interpret the situations of violence we encounter from a grassroots perspective. Your *firsthand*, eyewitness accounts give CPT credibility and authority among our constituents. Many newsworthy events occur in the areas where CPT works, but reports of such things are not useful for our network unless they include information about how the team is involved or connected or impacted by the event.
- **CPTNet is not a news agency.** It is not CPT's job to repeat information that appears, for example, in the New York Times unless there is some specific CPT involvement or response to the story. Nor is CPTNET the place to publicize concerns or action alerts from other groups unless, again, there is a clear CPT connection.
- **CPTNet reports are brief.** Keep reports to around 400 words. Occasionally stories or reflections will be a little longer, but in general, PEOPLE WILL NOT READ LONG PIECES. A large percentage of CPT staff time is spent editing materials that come in from the field. It is your job to produce information that is tight, complete, and rooted in direct experience.
- **Keep working at it.** Most of us were not born writers. CPT works hard at providing accurate, inspiring information to our readers that helps move the cause of nonviolence forward. We're all in the process of learning what connects to the heart, how much is too much, and how to make each word contribute to understanding and action for justice. Nine times out of ten your writing will be edited. It goes with the territory, so keep working at it.

Specific tips:

- For updates and news reporting, please use third person (e.g. they, he, her) rather than first person (e.g. I, we.) Personal reflections can use the first person.
- When you write a team member's name for the first time in a release use the whole name, e.g. Diane Janzen. Afterwards, refer to this person by his or her surname, not first name.
- Try to keep a consistent tense. In most cases of straight reporting that will be past tense.

IV. Writing for CPT.D (CPT's e-mail discussion group)

CPT.D is an open e-mail forum for discussion on CPT's vision and work. Anyone can post to this forum. CPT.D can lie dormant for weeks and then something will spark a flurry of discussion. It is important for CPTers to follow and participate in this forum to help keep the discussion grounded in CPT's direct experience.

Individuals contributing to CPT.D should:

- keep postings short
- connect comments to field experience
- limit contributions to once a day on "hot topics"

To subscribe to CPTNet and CPT.D, send the following information to <server@mennolink.org>:

Groups: [all the groups you wish to subscribe to] i.e. menno.org.cpt.news, menno.org.cpt.d
Name: [your first and last name]
City: [your city & state/province]
Congregation: [your congregation or organization]

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Updated 7/07