

Ten Elements to Include in Every Prayer Letter

When you write your prayer letter, you're usually focused on the main story that you're telling this month, but there are other elements that you should include in every prayer letter, and many of them often get overlooked.

When you finish up your next prayer letter, make sure it has these ten elements somewhere on the page:

1. Your Name

Obvious, right? But oh so easy to forget to include, especially if you've just made a change to your layout, or if you're sending a postcard.

Don't rely on the fact that the envelope will have your name on it – prayer letters get separated from their envelopes, and can end up on the kitchen table with other letters.

Try to avoid the situation where your supporter has to pray something like this: "Dear God, please help those missionaries whose letter I just read. You know who they are, but I sure don't."

2. A Picture of Yourself

Including a picture of yourself or your family in every letter will go a long way toward keeping your relationship with supporters from becoming impersonal over time.

If you've included a picture of yourself as part of the main story, then you're all set. If not, or even if so, it's a good thing to include as a standard element in the header of your letter.

Just remember to update it every so often. It needn't be every month, but if you've been using the same picture for ten years, it's time to get a new one.

3. Your Sending Agency/Church

If you're in a sensitive location and there's a possibility the letter will get sent to you, this should probably be left out, but for everyone else, be sure to include the name of your sending agency or church. If they have a logo, that's worth including, too.

Your connection to your organization will help you build relationships with people who might not be as connected with you personally, but respect the organization. It also shows that you're being held accountable and have someone else looking at your finances, rather than being entirely on your own.

If you are entirely on your own, you should still include the name of your mission, and then take immediate steps to get yourself some accountability. But that's a topic for a different article.

4. Your Ministry Location

Where are you serving, again? If you don't mention this, and you're not quite on top of sending letters, and your supporter gets a lot of mail, they might have a hard time remembering if you're the missionary in Uganda, or the one doing campus ministry in LA. This may be especially true if you're a little more into sending newsletters full of kid pictures than maybe you should be!

Again, when a potential supporter finds out that you're a missionary in a place for which they have a burden, it's a lot easier to build the relationship.

5. Your Mission Statement

What is it that you're doing? You can often borrow this one from your missions agency, and it should be a short, one-line summary of what you're doing throughout the year.

Since every prayer letter you send can be an entry point for a new potential supporter, you should include a summary of what you're doing in every letter. It's also good to reinforce your mission with your existing supporters.

6. The Date

Include at least the month and the year. The day of the month doesn't hurt, either, and is essential when you write prayer requests that include something like, "Pray for our retreat next Friday."

If you're re-using the same newsletter layout each month (which you should – it will save you a lot of work), don't forget to update the date.

7. Contact Information

Include your mailing address, E-Mail address, phone numbers (if you want to get phone calls), and as much other info as is appropriate. It's important to be building your relationship with your readers while you're in the field, and encouraging two-way communication is a good way to do that.

If you're overseas and in a sensitive area, you may not want to include some of this information, but you should still figure out an appropriate way for someone to get in touch with you (through a trusted third party, perhaps), and include that.

8. Giving Information

You shouldn't make a big deal about money in every letter that you write – most of them should be about what's happening in your mission field.

That said, you should include a donations address and/or web site in every letter, either in the footer or a sidebar. You don't want people to have to hunt when they want to send you money!

9. Praises and Prayer Requests

This is a prayer letter, after all. Make sure you've included specific things that are worthy of prayer and praise. Many people create a sidebar or other offset text box with separate headings for Praise and Prayer Requests, which makes it easy for readers to pray through the list of items, without needing to re-read your letter each time.

10. Large, Color Pictures

Remember that many of your supporters are involved in ministry vicariously through you. Build that relationship by including pictures of events and interactions that you've had since your last prayer letter. Also, make sure that they're large enough to make out the detail. A group shot of 50 people at a conference squished into a two-inch square isn't all that helpful. Either focus on a small group of people, or make the group shot the entire width of the page.

Does your letter include all of these elements? There may be good reasons to not include one or more of them, especially on an occasional basis if you're doing something different, but you should have a reason for leaving out any of these elements.