

INSPIRING READERS IN 175 WORDS OR LESS

A guide to writing devotions



By Melanie Rigney
Catholic Writers Conference
March 2, 2010

WHAT IS A DEVOTION?



- Devotions usually are a reflection on a piece of Scripture, although in non-Lectio-based works, the reflection often is written first
- Frequently, devotions include a reader call to action that stems from the reflection
- Devotions typically are contained to the equivalent of one published page—175 to perhaps 300 words, max
- Some books and magazines consist solely of devotions; for others, devotions are a regular department or element

WHERE DO YOU FIND DEVOTIONS MARKETS?



- Catholic devotions
 - *Living Faith, My Daily Visitor*. Check the Web site or a current issue to determine whether a publication uses freelance writers
- General Christian devotions
 - *Daily Guideposts, The Upper Room, The Secret Place, Penned from the Heart*
- For more listings, see *Christian Writers Market Guide* and *Writer's Market*

GETTING STARTED

- Pray for the Lord's guidance
- Contemplate your writing strength: are you comfortable sharing a story in which you learned a lesson? Or are you more comfortable with a more intellectual or academic?
 - Devotions typically have a beginning, middle, and end... no matter how short they are or the style in which they are written.
 - If you tell a story in a devotion, you need to be in one place at the beginning, with a problem, and in another place at the end. You should be the one who learns.



GETTING STARTED

- Study the guidelines and the sample issues.
 - Do all of a publication’s devotions include an action item?
 - Which version of the Bible is used?
 - How many words long is the typical entry?
 - Is there a lot of “I” and “you” language, or is the voice more distant?
 - Is there a title for each entry?



WRITING



- If you're writing for a Lectionary-based publication, spend some time with the day's Scripture. Think about a time in your life that the message resonated.
- If there is an action item, experiment with writing that next. It may help you identify on the meat of the devotion.
- Don't worry about the length of the lesson on your first draft. Just get it out.

WRITING

- Think ahead. Some devotions are compiled six months to a year in advance.
- If the target publication is not Lectionary-based, consider relating an inspirational message to a secular holiday (Columbus Day, Labor Day, Mother's Day, etc.).



EDITING

- Cut adverbs and adjectives
- Start with the action; eliminate throat clearing that sets the story's background
- Stop when the lesson is learned; don't pontificate about how this experience made you a better person
- Provide a universal benefit or insight



Questions?
Best wishes!



Melanie Rigney
editor@editorforyou.com
4201 Wilson Blvd. #110328
Arlington, VA 22203-1859