

Media Policy & Guidelines

Effective communications with the media are critical to the diocese's ability to carry out its mission, share the Good News of Christ's teachings, and promote continued public support for the Episcopal Church and Christianity. Effective media relations best serve the diocese by:

- informing the public of what our churches can do for them;
- promoting our churches activities and events of significance;
- promoting diocesan activities and events of significance;
- promoting the Episcopal Church's activities and events of significance;
- promoting the activities and events of significance of related organizations such as Episcopal Relief and Development;
- expanding the general visibility of our churches, the diocese and the Episcopal Church;
- ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents and issues of a controversial and/or sensitive nature.

Policy

The Bishop or the Director of Communications serves as the official diocesan spokesperson and conveys the official diocesan position on issues of general diocese-wide impact or significance or situations that are of a particularly controversial or sensitive nature. Inquiries from the media about such issues should be referred to the Director of Communications.

Depending on the specific circumstances, the Bishop or the Director of Communications may designate another person to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.

In cases of critical significance to the diocese or Episcopal Church, the Director of Communications will work with the Bishop and others to develop an "Official Statement" to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the diocesan position.

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, the Director of Communications will handle all contacts with the media, and will coordinate the information flow from the diocese to the public. In such situations, all churches should refer calls from the media to the Director of Communications.

Dealing with the media

Clergy may certainly speak about their opinions, their views, and have every right to do so. But if someone wants "a statement" or to hear where the Diocese of West Missouri "stands" on an issue, please refer that person to the Director of Communications, or the Bishop. Clergy are free to respond to requests from the media regarding their churches and local events. In such cases, ideally, the Director of Communications should be notified as soon as possible to inform him/her of the contact. Such notification can be particularly important if follow-up inquiries are made with the diocese or other churches, so that we can ensure a coordinated, consistent diocesan response. Media inquiries should be referred to the Director of Communications if they involve issues with diocesan or church-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature.

Since positive media engagement is integral to our media policy, any ideas for articles or pieces that will positively portray the diocese, its work or our church community should also be directed to the Director of

Communications. The Director of Communications should also be notified about negative occurrences that are likely to become a news story.

Remember that any statement that you make on Social Media may be passed to the media, whether you intended the statement to be public or not.

The media will probably be looking for a short quip, not a reasoned, nuanced response. You will most likely find yourself quoted only in part, and perhaps not the best part of what you had to say at that. Your words may be lifted from the context in which you were trying to respond. Reporters and media folk just don't have in-depth knowledge of how our Church works, and most won't have or take the time to dig deeper. Their next deadline is always looming. We have to respond in such a way that they "get it" quickly and easily. That requires some preparation before the inquiry is received, especially if it is a face-to-face or phone inquiry that expects a rapid response loop. Written inquiries are wonderful because they give one time to respond thoughtfully, but we don't always have that luxury. Do your best.

Here are some guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial or relates to an individual church or local event:

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should be included when the notification is made to the Director of Communications.
- Wherever possible avoid Episcopal or church jargon that may create a barrier to a lay person understanding the point you are trying to get across.
- The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible being mindful of the reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, find a suitably qualified alternate (if appropriate the Senior Warden for example,) or the Director of Communications should be asked to handle the call.
- Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Then follow-up by contacting the appropriate person or the Director of Communications.
- Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
- Remember that in responding to the media, you can be seen as representing and speaking for your church, the diocese, the Episcopal Church and Christianity as a whole. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are
 1. legal issues,
 2. personnel issues,
 3. questions that involve integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or

4. a crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the Director of Communications.

- Any media inquiries that involve information about lay members should be directed to the Director of Communications.
- Any media inquiries regarding clergy or diocesan staff should be referred to the Director of Communications. Only public information may be provided without the written approval of the person concerned. Public information is the following: verification of position, ordination dates (if applicable), full or part-time status.

Emergency / Crisis

Crisis communications can have a major impact on the reputation and standing of your church and the diocese. How well we convey our message to the public depends on what is reported to the news media. This is especially true in a crisis, during which the news media is the primary means of communication to our members. Because of the emotions that usually accompany crises, images formed from crisis reporting are especially important in shaping long-lasting public impressions of the church.

In the event of a major crisis on affecting one or more churches, or a natural or man-made disaster, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are routed to the appropriate sources.

The Director of Communications is responsible for the development and dissemination of all diocesan communications in the event of a church emergency. This includes internal communications with the members of the diocese, as well as communications with the media. The priority will be on maintaining timely and open communications with the media, providing complete and accurate information that has been confirmed about the emergency situation and the diocesan response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media will be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation. The diocesan Web site will be utilized as a key medium for updating our diocesan community and the public on the details of the emergency situation and actions we are taking to address all related issues.

If warranted, a media center will be established in the event of a widespread incident/disaster. The media center will include workspace for media personnel, equipped with electricity and Internet connections.

In a diocesan emergency clergy and staff have a right not to speak with the media. The media will be provided with limited access to pre-defined public areas within Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral.

Contacts

Director of Communications

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Our Focus and Message

I hope the following thoughts help. They are gleaned from ongoing discussions about “branding” our Church in order to focus its message and better define our identity to the world, and I hope they prove useful as you frame your thinking should you have to deal with the media. +Bishop Marty

We are an anchored and yet forward looking Church. We have a “tradition of tomorrow”. For over 450 years the Episcopal Church (including its predecessor days in the Church of England) has looked to the future. We look back through history to Jesus and his Apostles for our roots, our base, our foundation. We respect the “yesterday” of our faith so we can better serve its “tomorrow” – our nation’s, society’s, and world’s “tomorrow”. This means we strive each day to find new ways of looking at timeless messages of hope, community, grace, salvation, liberation, dignity, spirituality, humanity, and duty. It means we embrace the dangerously progressive spirit Jesus established for our faith long ago, which calls us also to affirm and welcome new ways of thinking and building community. For us looking back brings us to looking forward.

Submitting a Media Report

If you have a media contact you need to discuss, or wish to share details of upcoming events, or positive news stories about your church or the diocese, please contact the Director of Communications.

Spirit Magazine & eSpirit Newsletter

If you want to write for the Spirit Magazine or have a News item you want to be included in the eSpirit Newsletter please read the related article submission guidelines.

Spirit: <http://www.diowmo.org/spirit-article-submission.html>

eSpirit: <http://www.diowmo.org/espirit-article-submission.html>