

Press Releases & The Media

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

- **Determine in advance who in your church will talk to the media**
And make sure everyone knows who is authorized to talk to the media. Anyone reached by the media should pass along the designated person's contact info — nothing more. If a reporter keeps trying to ask questions, just repeat, "I'll ask the right person get in touch with you very soon."
- **Develop & practice your talking points** (*used by the designated contacts*)
Know the message you want to convey. Prepare in advance your basic response on subjects that could generate media inquiries (ie, social justice positions, community events). See below for crisis talking points.
- **Practice deflecting questions you don't want to answer**
You aren't obligated to answer every question you're asked. Say, "That's an interesting question," then move to one of your talking points. You can also say you'd prefer not to answer the question.
- **Know your elevator speech**
An elevator speech describes your church in 45-60 seconds. Everyone should know the elevator speech.

BEFORE & DURING A CRISIS

A crisis can take many forms — a devastating fire or vandalism, natural disaster, a shooting in your community, an accusation that affects your church, a public event or incident involving a member of your leadership or staff. Be prepared!

- **Make a plan for how you'll communicate in a crisis**
At a minimum, be prepared to issue a statement — but always prepare someone to respond directly to media inquiries. Plan to share an appropriate level of information.
- **Prepare talking points in advance**
Imagine the worst and discuss how you want to respond. If your church has accepted a potential risk, prepare talking points for the worst case scenario. Consider how you want to respond to a potential crisis before an event occurs to avoid making decisions when emotions may be running high.
- **Forward church calls, or frequently check your answering machine**
You want to respond to media calls quickly — even if you just ask for deadline information and promise a response.
- **Respond to the media**
The failure to communicate with the media often creates a bigger problem. Members of the media are simply doing their job, and they're going to write a story. Be sure *your* perspective is heard.
- **Never tell a reporter you have "no comment"**
Always tell reporters you'll get back to them or that you'll have the right person call them. Ask about their deadline, and follow up on any promises you make to a reporter.
- **Avoid speaking "off the record"**
While most reporters will honor a request to speak "off the record," you must make the request *in advance* of making the comment!
- **Contact the Association**
The Western NC Association leadership can provide support and expertise as you navigate the challenges you face should a crisis occur.

SHARE YOUR GOOD NEWS

Craft your content

When writing a press release, follow the classic journalist's set of questions: who? what? when? where? how? why? —

- Lead with the hook in your first paragraph, along with the who, what, when and where. Don't get too fancy — reporters don't want to have to work to find the facts.
- Offer the important details in the next paragraph or two — some why and how — and include (or craft) a quote or two from the appropriate leaders. Often, these quotes find their way into the published news stories.
- Provide background, if needed, in the next paragraph.
- Close with a standard paragraph about your church.

Format your document

- Use the top third of the first page for contact information and the headline. Use double-spacing throughout, -- more -- at the end of each page, and end the document with # # #
- Write a short, snappy headline
- Try to keep your release to two pages, double-spaced

Distribute your release

- Maintain an updated list of local media contacts: names, email and phone, areas of interest
- Send your release well in advance of events — at least three weeks for print; six weeks for radio/TV Public Service Announcements (PSA).

Check out these resources

- PR Newswire
<http://bit.ly/fromPRNewswire>
- The Guardian
<http://bit.ly/fromtheguardian>
- CBS News
<http://bit.ly/fromCBSNews>
- Forbes.com
<http://bit.ly/fromForbes>