

Local Church Crisis Communications Plan

A well-practiced Crisis Communications Plan allows church leaders to:

- Provide compassion, concern and care for the victims of the crisis and those affected by the crisis;
- Meet the needs of the media covering the crisis;
- Project a positive image for the church.

Local Church Media Policy

It is the policy of _____ (church name) to provide accurate, timely, and consistent information to the news media and public.

To ensure clear and consistent communications with the news media, all church staff should direct questions and inquiries from the media to _____ (spokesperson); church volunteers should direct media inquiries to _____. The spokesperson can then loop the District Superintendent or the Conference Director of Communications in for assistance.

Crisis Communications Team

The church pastor is the Crisis Team Leader. The rest of the team includes the _____ (could be the Council Chair, Lay Leader, office secretary/manager/Director of Communications), the District Superintendent, and the Conference Director of Communications. Depending on the nature of the crisis, additional members such as SPRC Chair, Trustees Chair, or Finance Chair/ Secretary may be added to the Crisis Communications Team depending on the context of the crisis.

Roles and Responsibilities

Pastor and/or Back-Up Crisis Communications Team Leader

- Chair meetings of Crisis Communications Team
- Assign duties to members of Crisis Communications Team
- Approve media statements and release of other information
- Review both internal and media reports on crisis
- Supervise the Administrative Secretary/Office Manager/Director of Communications, who serves as Team Coordinator
- Communicate with key people in the community and other church ministry partners as appropriate
- Conduct a crisis debriefing meeting at least two weeks after the end of a crisis

Director of Communications

- Gather facts and information about the crisis and prepare background info. for media
- Work with Crisis Communications Team to develop media statements
- Coach the spokesperson prior to media interviews

Church's Team Coordinator

- Handle inquiries from the media
- Monitor and report media activity to the Crisis Communications Team

Members of Crisis Communications Team

- Get the situation under control: If reporters are already at the church, staff should follow the guidelines outlined in "Media Procedures for Church Staff" and "Handling Media On-Site."
- Develop a strategy and timetable for disseminating information to the public and internal
- Designate a spokesperson to handle media interviews

- Based on the facts that are confirmed, develop a brief statement and include:
 1. Brief, confirmed facts about what happened
 2. Explanation of church's response
 3. Expression of care and concern for any victims

Spokesperson

- Review public reports on the crisis.
- Review facts, anticipate questions, and practice statements for the media.
- Speak to the news media.

Conference Chancellor/Legal Counsel (if added to the Crisis Communications Team)

- Provide information on liability related to the crisis
- Review, as necessary, statements and releases to the media for legal implications

Church Support Staff/Volunteers

- If a reporter calls, use the hold response.
- Use the telephone log questions to gather information from the reporter in an email to the pastor or designated spokesperson.
- Don't answer the reporter's questions, offer opinions, or speculate in any way.

Media Procedures for Church Staff

“Hold Response”

“I want to make sure we give you the most accurate and up-to-date information. Our *Pastor (or the lead spokesperson)* can best help you. If you give me your contact information, deadline, and topic that you're calling about, I'll have that person return your call as soon as possible.”

Email “Telephone Log” for Media Calls

- Add the answers to the questions below into an email to the pastor or spokesperson. This is the telephone log sheet for media inquiries about a crisis.
- Never transfer a call to voicemail without sharing the answers to these questions via email with the pastor or spokesperson.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name of the person taking the message 2. Date & Time of Call 3. Reporter's Name & Media Outlet 4. Telephone Number & Email 5. Reporter's Deadline & Topic of story 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. What information does the reporter want? 7. What information does the reporter already have? 8. Other Notes?
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Guidelines for Handling Media On-Site

- Identify a location where reporters and photographers park vehicles and stand while they're covering the story.
- Establish an Interview Location.
- Designate a staff person to explain and enforce the boundaries
- Be polite, but firm.
- Be proactive: If you see a photographer and/or reporter interviewing people or taking photographs/video on or near the church property, the designated person should introduce themselves and find out what they're doing in a friendly and helpful manner then direct them to the designated interview location.