



ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

Any media communications for, or on behalf of this church should:

- Be consistent with the Vision, Mission and Values.
- Promote the church's ministries, activities and events of significance.
- Expand the general visibility of this church.
- Ensure that accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents and issues of a controversial and/or sensitive nature.

POLICY

The Chairman of the Board/Leadership Team and the Senior Minister serve as the official spokespersons. They are jointly responsible for communicating the official church position on all media issues or situations, particularly issues of a controversial or sensitive nature. Inquiries from the media should be immediately referred to the Senior Minister who will consult with the Chairperson of the Board/Leadership Team.

Depending on the specific circumstances, the Senior Minister may designate another member of the Ministry Team, Board/Leadership Team or appropriate member to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.

In cases of critical significance to the church, the Chairperson of the Board/Leadership Team and the Senior Minister will work with the Board/Leadership Team to develop a "position paper" to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the church's position.

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, the Senior Minister (or their Appointee from the Ministry Team) will handle all contacts with the media, and will coordinate the information flow from the church to the public. In such situations, all staff should refer calls from the media to the Senior Minister or designated person from the Ministry Team.

NON-CONTROVERSIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

The following are guidelines for communicating with the media **when requested by the Senior Minister or Chair of the Leadership Team**:

- Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast.
- The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest.
- Ensure that 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 member of the Ministry Team.
- Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." A "no comment" response may be easily misinterpreted.
- Remember that in responding to the media, you can be seen as representing and speaking for the church. Personal opinions should NOT be expressed. You should be fully aware of the church's position on the issue.
- Do not allow the use of your role if you are responding to an interview on a personal basis.

- Issues that should NOT be discussed with reporters are 1) legal issues, 2) personnel issues, 3) questions that involve church integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4) a church crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the Senior Minister.

EMERGENCY / CRISIS

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

In the event of a major crisis, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are immediately directed to the Senior Minister or Chairperson of the Board/Leadership Team (if the Senior Minister cannot be contacted immediately).

The Senior Minister or delegated member of the Senior Minister will be responsible for the development and dissemination of all communications in the event of an emergency or crisis. This includes internal communications with staff and the general congregation, 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 church's response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media will be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation.

In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, staff have a right not to speak with the media. The media will only be granted access to the external areas of the church property. Any situations where individuals feel a reporter has abused their rights should be reported to the Chairperson of the Board/Leadership Team.

In any crisis situation, COCWA recommends that the Board Chair / Senior Minister contact the COCWA office for advice and / or referral to professional media consultants who are retained by COCWA.

POLICY SCOPE

The above policy applies to any paid staff member and any person who holds a volunteer leadership position in any ministry area. Ministry Team members are asked to make this policy available to all ministry area leaders annually, or at the commencement of any new leadership appointment.