



MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES

REV. LAURA'S MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE- MARCH 2017

MCC Core Values: Delight, Excellence, Diversity, Gratitude, Relationships

Media Goals:

- Support Christian institutions in communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ with excellence.
- Amplify a diversity of voices in the Church.
- Share experience and knowledge of best practices in media relations in a mutually affirming, non-competitive way that builds up all parts of the body of Christ.

Responding to Media Requests: if a journalist contacts you, you get to decide if you want to respond. But remember, the reporter likely has out multiple calls, so work quickly if you do want to respond.

- Respect that they are often on deadline, so try to return calls immediately.
- BUT, if a reporter calls and you are not prepared, you can always say "I'm happy to chat about this, but need a few minutes. Can I call you back shortly? What's your deadline and what's a good number to reach you?"
- Get clear on your message: What are you trying to say and who can best say it? Before I return a call to a journalist, I write out my three sentences. Short sentences, punchy verbs, clear ideas. If you make yourself clear and quotable, you're more likely to be quoted in a way you like!
- Build a good rapport: If you aren't the right person for them to be talking to, suggest someone else who might be.
- Use your best pastoral judgment. Especially in a time of crisis, you get to set the boundaries on what is discussed and what is photographed. After a tragic crash with lots of witnesses, I told press that they were welcome to interview me and another community member outside, but that the grief counseling inside was solely for the witnesses. Try to help them get their story, but also be wise.
- If you end up as a de facto or intentional spokesperson for someone else (again, especially in a time of crisis), you can help ensure that the person knows the media request is coming, has agreed to talk with the press, and has some time to prepare. I make it a practice not to give out cell phone numbers without asking the person, so I'll often say to a reporter "I'd be happy to connect you with Rev. Rivera who is responding to the fire next to her church. Let me check in with her and get the best number for you to reach her at, and I'll get right back to you."
- Remember, you can always say "No, thank you" when asked to speak with the media. You can use your best pastoral judgment about what is helpful visibility, and what is not.
- Offer thanks. Most journalists are trying to hold power accountable, and tell stories of truth and beauty. It's not easy work. Thank them for their passion and professionalism.

Initiating Media Coverage:

Things you want to advertise are generally not news. Your church's upcoming choir concert isn't newsworthy, but your new solar panels on the parish hall or your parish's support of local family displaced by a fire might be. As you are considering if your event or experience is newsworthy, ask yourself:

- Does this *really* affect the lives of people beyond the membership of my congregation?
- Is it tied to current events or something else that is in the news?
- Is it novel?
- Are a large number of people affected by this experience or event?

If you have a sense that something new, novel, or influential is happening in your local congregation, you are welcome to contact me (council@masscouncilofchurches.org or 617-523-2771) and together we can figure out if something is newsworthy or a part of a larger trend. I can help connect you to the right media outlets. You can also reach out to reporters yourself. Many town-level media outlets (cable access tv, local radio, blogs, weekly papers) are hungry for regular content. You can provide this! Get to know the folks who work there and ask what they are looking for.

Twitter is full of both elected officials and journalists and a good way to be in direct communication with people who might never open an email from you. Find out who from your local media outlets is on twitter and follow them. Share what they post. Cultivate a relationship, and then ask how you can be helpful. Additionally, you can create enough buzz or visibility with a lot of people tweeting on your topic to prompt media outlets to cover you.

Tips for Writing Media Coverage:

- Look at sample press releases and model your writing accordingly. Here: <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/press-release-template/>
- Write clearly. Keep your sentences short, crisp, and clear. Use strong verbs and memorable turns of phrase. Tell short stories. Quote participants and community members. Show the scope and scale of the issue.
- Write as if you are the reporter, with perspective from multiple voices. Write as if the whole (ONE PAGE) document could be cut and pasted into a column
- If you are trying to draw coverage to an event, write a "Media Advisory" and post it on your website and Facebook page. Tweet it out to relevant local media outlets. Include your event #Hashtag (and have people plan on using it) . A good template is [here](#).

After Media Coverage:

- De-brief: What did you learn? What worked well? What would you do differently next time?
- View the coverage and see if your main points were the ones the media picked up. If not, work next time to get your message clearer. If you feel like your quote was rambling, next time draft shorting talking points.
- If you feel like you were misquoted, you can call the journalist to discuss. Remember, you're cultivating a relationship that is hopefully going to transcend one story, so be candid, fair, and gracious.