

In times of crisis, you will likely see the soul of your organization, as well your own, exposed for better or for worse. You'll see, sometimes suddenly, weaknesses that need attention both in yourself and your organization. And you'll lay awake nights searching for strengths and strategizing about how you can build upon them.

The best time to plan for a crisis is before you have one!

***Most of the material presented here is drawn from the book *Not If, but When*, published by United Methodist Communications, and from the *Episcopal Communicator's Manual*, Diocese of Texas Office of Communications.*

COMMON COMPONENTS OF CRISES

- They arise suddenly.
- Information and key leaders are not always available when you need them.
- Every crisis provides its own opportunity to position your organization in the way it wants to be understood. This opportunity comes very early in the game.
- All crises tend to impair judgment and clear thinking.

LIFE CYCLE OF A CRISIS

The typical life cycle of a crisis begins with the event, quickly moves to investigative coverage, and eventually to blame-assignment, public reaction, reminders, and disinterest. Your objective is to get from the event to disinterest as quickly as possible. The longer that full and complete facts are not forthcoming, the longer the situation continues to be unresolved, the longer the crisis will be kept alive. The longer the crisis lives, the more damage that will be done.

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CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

Permanent Basic Team:

Rector, Communications Director, Sr. Warden, and other staff or congregational leaders as needed. Designate only one spokesperson.

Expanded Diocesan Team might include as needed:

Legal counsel, Canon for Evangelism & Mission, financial officer, dean or other regional administrator, representative from a public relations firm, or media professional, other support personnel as required.

Whoever comprises your team should be available 24 hours a day during the entire life cycle of the crisis by phone, email, and in person. Do not assume team members know their responsibilities. Make specific assignments. Prepare a list of duties and actions expected of each team member.

Make sure every member of the team understands who is responsible for what. Establish a clear chain of command and an agreed-upon approval process for action and the dissemination of information.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The optimum time within which to respond to a crisis is 90 minutes. The longer you take to respond, the bigger the chance that public opinion will be swayed by others. Having a plan will enable you to respond quickly.

A good plan is characterized by the following standards:

- Openness, accessibility, availability and willingness to respond
- Truthfulness and honesty without conditions
- Responsiveness to all constituencies

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