

An important element of parish communications is building good relationships with media and others who write stories and cover events in your city or region. Reporters and writers are not interested in talking to you only when there's a crisis or something controversial happening. They also want to hear the great stories about your congregation and how you make a difference in your community.

How to cultivate media relations

Depending on the size of your congregation, either a staff member or a volunteer from the congregation should research the media in your area. Get to know the reporters and assignment editors at newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations in your coverage area. Don't forget to include digital versions of newspapers and local magazines.

If possible, try to arrange an in-person meeting to introduce yourself and your congregation to reporters and editors. Talk with them about the types of stories they cover and are interested in covering. As those relationships with media are cultivated, you'll be considered a trustworthy resource for reporters. Although this may take a little time in an already busy schedule, building these relationships with the media can prove invaluable. Not only will you have contact information for the media to pitch your events and activities, the media outlets will consider you a good resource for an interview during newsworthy events and stories happening in your city or state that may have an impact on your congregation, the The Episcopal Church, or our global ministry partners.

Consider creating a congregational policy for dealing with requests from the media for information in non-crisis situations.

- Establish who on the staff can respond to reporters' calls immediately.
- Determine what information can be given by anyone on the staff (confirming the spelling of a name or a title, numbers who attend worship, calendar information).
- Establish a protocol for notifying other members of the staff that a reporter has contacted the church.
- Be proactive in providing good news story tips to the media

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Methods to engage with the media

Press release

A press release will help you share information with the media about parish events or activities. These events may include:

- a milestone event such as a congregational anniversary
- Special outreach or mission projects
- multi-parish, ecumenical or interfaith events.

A press release is written in the style of news coverage, as the story you would like to see written after your media event has taken place. It should read like a short article, with data and quotes that will be easy for the media to use in their reporting.

In contrast to a media advisory, which provides only basics, a press release generates a story that journalists can use to inform their writing.

The best practice is to send the release a month in advance and follow up two weeks before the event.

Media advisory

A media advisory is a one-page description of a future event. It is an exclusive invitation with just the most important details. It gives the facts, listed clearly, without interpretation or introduction. Think of it as an invitation that answers only the five important questions: Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

The advisory should be sent at least five days before the event and must be newsworthy. Be sure to catch their attention.

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Press Release Template

St. John's Episcopal Church to Celebrate 120th Anniversary

St. John's Episcopal Church, in YOUR CITY, South Carolina, will celebrate the 120th anniversary of its congregation during a special liturgy at 11am on Sunday, May 1.

Located at 120 Main St. since its construction in 1899, St. John's has been regarded as one of the foundations of this city's downtown district. The congregation has weathered many changes to the area and recently opened a day-care center and food pantry to serve the changing neighborhood.

“We are so excited to celebrate our parish's anniversary with our community,” said the Rev. John Doe, Rector of St. John's. “For the past 120 years, our congregation has served has sought to share Christ's love with our community. All are welcome here.”

The public is invited to attend the service, which will be followed by a community meal in the fellowship hall.

[Add general information about your congregation]

For information contact:

[Insert name]

[Insert phone number and email where media can reach you]

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Media Advisory Template

Media advisory

WHO / WHAT: The Rev. Jane T. Smith, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in YOUR CITY, South Carolina, will join with local faith leaders in a walk to end hunger and poverty among vulnerable communities across the region.

WHEN: 10am on Tuesday, July 10

WHERE: City Food Pantry 100 N. State Street

WHY: St. Paul's Episcopal Church is committed to supporting sustainable solutions that address the root causes of hunger and poverty. Reporters interested in an interview with the Rev. Smith should contact [church communications staff contact info].

About St. Paul's Episcopal Church:

[Add general information about your congregation]

For information contact:

[Insert name]

[Insert phone number and email where media can reach you]


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