

# The art of communication

*Communication: the imparting or exchange of  
information, ideas, or feelings*

A brief guide for Church Communicators

**Living Worship • Growing Disciples • Seeking Justice**

# What we do

**T**he main purpose of the communications department is to support the Diocese in telling the good news of Jesus, to make sure the Church's voice is heard in the public sphere, and to let people know about the great things that are happening in our parishes across the diocese.

We are proactive in our work with the media, and supply TV, radio and local newspapers with positive stories about the Church. We also respond to requests from the media for information and comment on stories that they are pursuing.

Our weekly electronic update reaches more than 500 people and with its blend of news stories, notices, training days and diary events, it keeps people informed about what is happening in the diocese. It encourages a two-way flow of information, publicising major events in the life of the diocese.

The department also manages the use of social media, an important way of letting people know what is happening in the Church, and the diocesan website, making sure it is regularly updated and restocked with new stories and photographs.

Printed publications are still important and we produce documents, leaflets and booklets for the other departments based in Jubilee House, along with a monthly edition of Nifty Notes.

Campaigns and projects designed to promote the Gospel – at a national and a local level – are supported, and training courses on aspects of communication are provided.

**Richard Ellis**  
**Communications director**

# Dealing with the media

This can be a daunting prospect but the communications team is here to help.

## What to do when a reporter calls

Don't panic. Always be courteous.

Buy yourself some time... if the call is unexpected, find out what they want and ask them to ring back in five minutes. This gives you time to think, and write out what you want to say, even if it's just a few bullet points. If you agree to ring them back, make sure you do.

If you are uncertain or uneasy about dealing with the call contact your friendly communications office – they are there to help you, 24 hours a day.

You don't have to answer their questions, so don't be pressed into doing so. If you have problems answering a question, don't flannel. If appropriate, tell the reporter you'll find out and call back.

Don't go "off the record" and talk about things you would not want to be published. It's too risky.

Be positive - mere denials or 'no comments' suggest you have something to hide. This could be an opportunity to kill false rumours.

If a call relates to an active police matter say so, and close the call politely with 'no comment to make'.

The reporter has column inches / air minutes to fill. Feed them your facts in a way that dictates the angle of the interview. If you don't want it reported, don't say it!

***The Press, Watson, is a most valuable institution, if you only know how to use it.***

*Arthur Conan Doyle*

# Local media

## Working with local media

Local media can help you reach people who will never otherwise come into contact with your church, and being in the news helps build your profile in the community, letting people know that the Church is still alive and active in their part of the world.

It's great to hear good stories about your Church and it is a good counterbalance to some of the negative publicity that appears in the media.

News coverage is free and it's not that hard to get your story into the media – newspapers, radio, and TV stations need news, it is soon used up and needs to be replenished on a very regular basis.

So what makes a news story? At the risk of stating the obvious it is something that is new eg a new minister, a new club for older people etc.

It is also something that is unusual: 'church holds harvest festival' is not new or unusual, but 'church holds harvest festival in allotments' is new, and it's also a little bit quirky, which will interest the media.

The first/biggest/oldest/youngest - the media love statistics and milestones. It has to be genuinely local, so national church campaigns are not particularly interesting to the media unless a local church has found an interesting way to engage with it.

A picture is worth a thousand words: Think about picture possibilities to go with your story – the media will be more likely to cover something with a visual angle.

Human interest – the media want stories about people, so look for human interest stories. If your church gets a new font, that is unlikely to attract the media (unless it is truly spectacular or there is another angle to it). If, however, it was hand-made by a local craftsman who toiled over it for months because his mother used to go to the church, you're well on the way.

“ ***The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place*** ”  
*George Bernard Shaw*

# Writing a press release

Think of a title/headline that tells the story. Make it interesting to grab the attention of the newsdesk (they will be reading many such releases).

Decide what is the most important feature of the story and include it in the first paragraph. Get all the basic facts - What? Who? When? Where? Why? How? - as early as possible in the story.

Write in short sentences and keeps paragraphs no longer than a few lines (that's how most of the newspaper do it).

Use quotes. A relevant comment from a person directly involved in an event adds interest and helps the flow.

Steer clear of jargon. If you have to use 'churchy' words, explain them. Avoid flowery language and stick to the facts.

Use a layout with 'news release' and the church's name displayed prominently so that the newsdesk can see easily the source of the information.

Add your contact details and make sure you are available to answer follow-up questions from the media during the day. If you have a website, add the address so that reporters can find more information.

Keep the release to the equivalent of one side of A4 if possible, two at the very most. If journalists need more information, they will contact you.

Check the information with everyone involved before sending it out. Ask someone else to read it through to check for mistakes.

Send the release in good time. Send information about an event in the future, rather than an event which has happened.

“ **Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say infinitely when you mean very; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something really infinite** ”

C.S. Lewis

# Social media

Social media offers exciting new possibilities to share the Gospel and to interact with people we might not otherwise connect with. We can communicate with people, faster and more cheaply than ever before.

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through social media does not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness.

*Colossians 4:6*

*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

## **GUIDELINES**

Remember that the law views anything you share online as being in the public domain. If more than one person can access what you have written the law would class it as “published,” and therefore subject to numerous laws around libel, slander, copyright.

Assume that what you say is permanent. Even if you delete an online comment, it could already have been seen by other people and/or re-published on other sites. It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret.

As a rule of thumb, ask yourself:

- Would I be happy for my Mum to read this?
- Would I be happy for God to read this?
- Would I be happy with this on the front page of a national newspaper?

Do not assume anything electronic is secure. You might be able to delete or recall an email but there’s no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted “friends” or “followers” can see the things you say, but there is no guarantee that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles.

Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, always ask yourself, ‘Is this my story to tell?’

Remember that the law and diocesan safeguarding policy apply in your communications with children and young people – you should not exchange private messages with young people via social media and should not accept “friend requests” from young people without due consideration.

***Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.***

*Colossians 4:6*

# Photography

## Tips for taking pictures

Include people. Even if it's a story about a church building project make sure you get a person in the picture

Try to avoid pictures of people standing in rows

What are people going to wear?

It helps if the vicar wears his/her collar. Do the choir need to robe or the uniformed organisations come dressed for the part? This will all add colour.

What about facial expressions – are they appropriate? Are the people smiling if it is good news?

Do they look appropriately solemn if it's bad news? Think about the message of the story.

Don't be afraid to direct people to get the picture you want. It's much better to spend a few minutes longer and end up with a useable picture.

Check for any distractions in the background. Does any furniture need moving, curtains drawing?

Try unusual angles. For example, using a step ladder to look down on a crowd may make photographing a large group of faces easier.

With digital images, you can afford to take lots of shots. Even after you have a great picture, try to get a better one.

Try to establish a rapport with the subject (s). Keep talking to keep them focused.

Caption: get names of everyone, spelt correctly, and identified left to right. Always check that parents are happy to have pictures of their children in the paper.

“ *A picture is worth a thousand words ....* ”

# Notes/ Contacts

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