

APPROACHING **THE MEDIA**

★ **The Episcopal Diocese of Texas**

IDENTIFYING THE MEDIA

Begin by compiling a list of daily newspapers, television and radio stations (and specific local programs), suburban and college newspapers and newspaper supplements in your area. Use social media to your advantage. Follow reporters and notice what stories they are covering. Pay attention to the tweets and questions reporters may ask the public when they are looking for a story to cover on different platforms—you might have something to offer them.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Become familiar with the publication before you set up a meeting. Names of the editorial staff are listed on the newspaper's masthead, and you may call the paper to ask who customarily deals with religious news. At radio and television stations, ask for the news director. Note all deadlines and editorial requirements from reading publications. Make a list of the contacts' names, phone numbers, addresses and e-mails. This will be the list for your future press releases.

WEEKLIES

When making contact with local media, it is most important to pay attention to the local, neighborhood newspapers—usually the weeklies, circulated free in many communities or in the neighborhood sections of a larger newspaper. With small editorial resources of their own, they are particularly happy to have good stories of interest to their community.

College FM and cable and network stations may have talk shows in which your clergy, or others from your congregation, may participate. Local cable systems sometimes use church items in community service announcements.

TYPES OF MEDIA

Newspapers

Know who writes about religion or community interest items. Call the city editor or news editor and ask if you are not sure.

Television

Note reporters (as opposed to anchors) who typically cover religion or community news. Call the assignments editor if you are in doubt.

Radio

Call the station's assignments or news editor if you have a story idea or want to meet with a reporter. Many radio stations have talk shows or public affairs programs and might consider an interview if they think you have something interesting to say to their audience.

Community Publications

A church's most effective avenue for communication is the community-focused publications. These include special interest magazines, neighborhood newspapers, neighborhood editions of the city paper.

APPROACHING THE MEDIA

Face-to-face meetings are important in gaining mutual confidence. Much will be gained if you ask their interests and their needs. Call a media contact and ask for a brief appointment to introduce yourself and deliver information about your church with a list of calendar events. If you can't get an appointment, mail the information with a friendly, straightforward cover letter. Then follow up by phone and ask for an appointment to discuss ways in which you might be of help to the media contact.

Even when you don't get an appointment, it is critical that you follow up periodically.

WHAT TO ASK

Learn how they treat church news, how much advance notice of events they need, what kind of things they are interested in covering themselves, how they handle photos, etc. Ask how they like to receive news releases or stories. Take notes. When you leave, tell them you will be in touch when you have something newsworthy.

FOLLOW UP

Write a follow up thank you note saying you enjoyed meeting them, and thank them for all the information — or drop off a mug with the church logo, full of Hershey's Kisses or M&Ms, with your name and number. If they call you for a quote about the news item respond in a timely matter.

CONTACT TIPS

- Identify yourself by full name, organization, title and a quick explanation of why you are calling.
- Be courteous and attentive.
- Have all your facts at hand. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will find out and get back to them. Follow through.
- Highlight the new and unusual.
- Be brief.
- Don't talk "off the record," and keep in mind that what you say may be interpreted as "official policy."
- Don't thank a reporter for running your story; compliment the presentation.
- Never question why your story wasn't run; there will be other opportunities.
- Never bypass reporters by seeking coverage through their advertising department or other sections.
- The best time for reporters at dailies and broadcast stations is at the start of their day, before deadline pressures begin to build. With weeklies, it is the day after publication.