

## **Baptists Together Media support**

From time to time things go wrong in the local church, or there might be a local disaster or tragedy. At times like this, the local church can feel very vulnerable and do not always know how to cope with media attention (newspapers, radio, TV, online media). How would you respond if, say, sadly one of your young people was raped, if someone in your fellowship was charged with downloading child pornography or committed another crime, if your church premises were used for a controversial event, if someone made a statement on behalf of your church that was controversial, if your church secretary was murdered or a church member kidnapped? All of these things, and far more, have happened within BUGB churches.

Below are some simple broad tips to steer you through ...

### **We are here to support**

For specific media support, contact the Media Networker on 01235 517709. He will work with the church to create a simple statement for either media release or informing a congregation.

### **Be prepared!**

If you know something is brewing that could have media interest 'if it got out', then prepare a statement and process now – not when it is actually 'live and happening'!

### **Create a simple statement**

Firstly with the Minister and a few deacons we write a draft statement covering the basic facts about what has happened. We try for six to ten lines in the knowledge that the reader/listener/viewer might not understand jargon! If it is a situation that is not fully out in the public arena, we do not offer more than we need to as a starter. (We can always update the statement as more information becomes available eg a criminal offence, court hearing). In a very public case or event, let the church congregation know how you are dealing with the situation.

### **Content of statement**

Contact details of whom you want to be contacted by the media (name/mobile/landline/email). Also add the church website address if this has good positive information about the church. Many reporters will search the internet for more info.

It is always useful to ask the Media Networker to comment on any statement before it is used.

In child protection/vulnerable adult situations, contact your Regional Association Team for support or Anna MacFarlane ([amacfarlane@baptist.org.uk](mailto:amacfarlane@baptist.org.uk)), one of our national Safeguarding Officers.

### **Ask for time to respond**

If a reporter phones and you want ten minutes to compose yourself/check what you are going to say with someone else, say you will call them back and take a number. If they are on a deadline, even ten minutes wait will not hurt!

### **Keep the statement on you!**

Keep paper copies of this statement with you during the period that the situation is live, just in case you are taken by surprise by a reporter phoning you when you are in the supermarket ... it has happened! In a major crisis, have updated statements available in a window at the front of the church and copies available in the church office/foyer. Make sure that the Association and Union Media Networker each have copies of the statements, in case of media enquiries there.

### **Decide who will be the spokesperson**

To make sure that messages/responses to the media are consistent, decide who will be the spokesperson. Then inform the deacons and church who this is so they can pass queries on to the relevant person.

### **Try not to say 'no comment'**

This sounds defensive. It is better to simply say things like...'I am sorry but I am not the best person to answer that question'. 'I am afraid I do not have any more facts available at the moment'. 'You will understand that this is a very difficult time for xxx at the moment'. Try to be helpful.

### **Inform the church and groups that meet on church premises**

If you have loads of groups meeting outside Sunday services make sure they know what to do. If a reporter turned up at 'Mums and Toddlers', how would the group leader respond?

### **Church Notice Boards**

If your church is busy and open in the week and you have an ongoing media crisis, remember that a reporter could take contact information from posters on your church notice board.

### **Mission Opportunities**

Remember that there could be significant (appropriate) mission opportunities in a difficult situation. At a time of tragedy, consider what few words of hope might bring comfort to the community. At a time of loss, what few words would you like the area/world to hear about that person's life?

Remember too that some reporters/broadcasters are also Christians! If they are not, what will their contact with you/your church do to help them feel that our faith and behaviour - in relating to them - marks us out?

### **Create day-to-day relationships with local media**

A key tip is to try and get to know the media when things are running smoothly. Offer stories and information regarding events to the local media outlets. Ask them to visit; what stories do they like to cover, would they like to attend a major event? Often when things then get rough they will know that normally your fellowship is a great place to be.

### **Media Contact information:**

Direct telephone: 01235 517709

Email [media@baptist.org.uk](mailto:media@baptist.org.uk)

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