

Media Relations Policy

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1. Overview

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle recognises the importance of the media as a tool for communication, and we have the responsibility to be open and responsive to their information requests. This policy outlines the coordination of contact between the Diocese and the media. It is designed to ensure that in all dealings with the media, the Diocese acts in a professional, coordinated manner and that all statements made are accurate and appropriate.

The policy sets out a suggested code of conduct and standard operating procedures for media liaison. In dealing with the media, all staff members and clergy should be conscious that they may be seen as representatives of the Diocese and should therefore avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the long-term reputation to the Diocese.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The organisation welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

2. Purpose

This policy exists to assure that information disclosed by The Anglican Diocese is timely, accurate, comprehensive, authoritative and relevant to all aspects of the Diocese. Adherence to this policy is intended to provide an effective and efficient framework to facilitate the timely dissemination of information. The policy also identifies who will represent The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle in speaking to the media.

It is the responsibility of all staff, board members and volunteers to ensure that effective media relations are maintained in order to achieve the aims of the Diocese.

For the purposes of this policy, media contact (on behalf of the Diocese) includes: providing information via media releases or statements, letters to the editor, responding to media enquiries over the phone and via email, interviews or briefings, disclosing information to the media, comments on talkback radio, addressing a seminar or conference where the media are present, and media activities for events, reports, and launches.

3. Definitions

3.1 Media

Communication and broadcasting channels such as newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio, through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated.

3.2 Media Relations

Media relations is the interaction with reporters, journalists and editors in print (newspaper and magazines) electronic (radio and television stations), and online (bloggers) media in order to communicate messages, stories and information.

3.3 Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is a sub-specialty of the public relations profession that is designed to protect and defend an individual, company, or organization facing a public challenge to its reputation.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Bishop

The Bishop will be the official spokesperson for the Diocese and will coordinate contact with the media through the Communications Manager.

4.2 Assistant Bishop

The Assistant Bishop is the secondary spokesperson for the Diocese and is also responsible for approving all external content for media including media releases, media statements and letters to the editor.

4.3 Communications Manager

The Communications Manager will cultivate relationships with journalists, field and filter media enquiries, and keep media contact records. Other responsibilities include drafting or coordination of media releases and statements and coordination of media interviews, media kits and background material; liaison with appropriate staff to coordinate responses to media issues, and alerting senior management to sensitive or controversial media issues relevant to the organisation.

4.4 Clergy

Clergy will generally manage any media enquiry directly relating to their parish/church. On matters relating to the Diocese, or where the Diocese will be impacted by the media inquiry, advice should be sought from the Communication Manager before commenting or committing to comment. It is reasonable to take a media enquiry on notice and indicate that a response will be provided in due course. Clergy take responsibility for contact with regional and local media but will seek advice on potentially significant or contentious issues. The Communications Manager is available to assist and advise clergy.

4.5 Staff

Non-media staff will not initiate media contact or respond directly to media enquiries related to the Diocese. Staff will advise the Communications Manager of likely events, announcements or issues that may attract media interest, and ensure information provided to the Communications team is accurate.

4.6 Schools

The Principal, or relevant communications staff, will generally manage local media inquiries linked to school promotions. On matters relating to the Diocese, or where the Diocese will be impacted by the media enquiry, advice should be sought from the Communication Manager before commenting or committing to comment. It is reasonable to take a media inquiry on notice and indicate that a response will be provided in due course. The Communications Manager is available to assist and advise schools.

5. Key Principles

Guidelines for working with the media are the same as the values, ethics and confidentiality policies Offices of the Diocese are expected to live every day. Here are some key principles to guide you:

- All media contact will be consistent with the Diocese's mission objectives and reflect the Christian values of the Diocese.
- You're an ambassador for the Diocese. If you are ordained, lead in or are employed by the Diocese, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Diocese.
- You should practice transparency and accountability in your interactions, while practicing courtesy and respect.
- Follow confidentiality and privacy regulations; the release of any information will remain consistent with the Diocese's confidentiality and privacy policies. Do not provide personal or private information to the media without prior consent.

6. Procedures

6.1 Handling Media Enquiries

- All media enquiries that have an impact on the wider Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, on topics that are considered controversial (issues related to sexual abuse, abortion, homosexuality, politics, war, etc.) and may result in a negative or contentious story about the Diocese, must be directed to the Communications Manager.
- If you are unsure whether the topic may be controversial or result in a contentious story about the Diocese, please contact the Communications Manager immediately.
- If a media enquiry is made on topics that are considered non-controversial, it is not necessary to immediately contact the Communications Manager; however, please make contact within 4 hours to report the media enquiry.

NB: All media reporters should be treated with courtesy and professionalism. Please act quickly when approached by the media to ensure that the reporter's deadline is met. The reporters first impression of The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle may end up being represented in the news story.

6.2 Responding to Diocesan Media Enquiries

- In response to any media contact or enquiry regarding a controversial topic, Diocesan personnel are to advise the reporter: ***"The Diocese of Newcastle's policy is to refer all media inquiries to Louise Mackay, our Communications Manager. You can reach her at (02) 4926 3733."***
- Do not respond by stating, "I am not allowed to talk to a reporter" or "I have to get permission to speak to you".
- Do not allow a reporter to compel you to answer questions on the spot.
- Contact the Communications Manager immediately, no later than one hour.
- Media responses should always be 'on the record'.
- All media enquiries, and the Diocese's responses, are to be logged with the Communications Manager.

6.3 Responding to Parish Media Enquires

- Do not let a reporter compel you to answer questions on the spot. It is always beneficial to prepare in advance in order to provide accurate and relevant information.
- Media responses should always be 'on the record'.
- All media enquiries, and the Diocese's responses, are to be logged with the Communications Manager.

6.4 Generating media relations

- Media releases about the Anglican Diocese will only be issued through the Communications Manager.
- In circumstances in which you believe you have a positive news story to share with the public, you may contact the media. Such delegation carries with it ongoing responsibility to act in the best interests of the Diocese.
- You may comment or disclose information to the media where the matters are:
 - Under your direct operational control; and
 - Cleared and authorised by the appropriate manager/supervisor.
- The Communications Manager is available to serve as a resource in contacting the media.
 - The Communications Manager will work with you to gather information and determine if and how the news media should be contacted. Similar measures used by editors and reporters will be considered to determine if your story is newsworthy.
 - Some news items may be more appropriate for internal publicity such as the Anglican Encounter newspaper or other forms of communications.

6.5 Releasing information

Unless there is specific approval by the Bishop, Bishop Administrator, Business Manager or Communications Manager, no staff/clergy shall divulge to the media any findings or determinations in relation to internal enquiries, reviews or investigations, financial information, personal information, information regarding the Royal Commission, or any matters that have broad organisational implications.

6.6 Guidelines for Photographs and Film

- In circumstances where the media is requesting permission to take photographs or to film inside our buildings and facilities, the Communications Manager must be contacted as above.
- A reporter or camera crew may show up unannounced at your facility. Please know that the Communications Manager will not send the media to any facility without the prior approval of the facility manager.
- When dealing with reporters and camera crews who may show up unannounced, the facility manager and staff should act with courtesy and professionalism.
- Contact the Communications Manager immediately and let them know which news source is there. The Communications Manager will contact the camera crew's news room or the print photographer's editor for clarification.
- NB. We cannot prevent the filming or photographing of common areas outside of our facilities which we do not operate. Examples would include public parking lots, courtyards and walk ways.
- The following guidelines should be used when television camera crews or print photographers show up unannounced at your facility.
 - Although we cannot prevent the media from photographing or filming the exterior of our facilities, we will contact their news room and/or editors for clarification.
 - The media cannot enter Diocesan facilities to record, photograph or attempt to interview anyone without explicit permission.
 - The media cannot block the entrance to our facility or prevent people from entering our facility or conducting business as usual.

7. Crisis Communication

In the event of an extreme crisis, the situation and the parish must be handled immediately through the Diocesan Office of Communications. The Communications Manager will work with the appropriate Manager and staff to develop a media response that is consistent with the organisation's media strategy and mission.

7.1 Communication Policy for Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Clergy or Other Church Personnel

- The Bishop of Newcastle is the official spokesperson for the Diocese of Newcastle on all media enquiries in regards to sexual abuse within the Diocese or the Royal Commission.
- The Communications Manager serves as the main media contact and administers the media policy. This follows a Royal Commission communications policy already in place.
- No contact or response to the media should be initiated through any other Diocesan staff/clergy.
- If media representatives initiate contact with Diocesan staff/clergy, the enquiry should be referred to the Communications Manager.
- All media enquires will receive a response. No media outlet or representative is to be ignored.
- All staff/clergy will report emerging issues of potential media and public sensitivity relating to the Diocese to the immediate attention of the Communications Manager.

8. Working with Minors

Parental permission must be obtained if minors under 18 years old are to be photographed, filmed, interviewed or otherwise identified by the media. Permission pro-formas are available from the Media Directorate.

9. Breach of this Policy

If any unauthorised releases of confidential information do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

10. More Information

If any person is in doubt and seeks further clarification on any point, they should contact the Communications Manager at the Diocesan Office.