

How to secure positive media coverage

At every level in the Church individuals live by its values and render service to others, especially the most vulnerable in society. They do not seek publicity for its own sake. However, it is generally recognised that proactive communication of positive values and deeds has the potential to bring comfort to others at a time of need and encourage people to live their lives in a different way. Coverage also has the potential to stimulate a new or renewed interest in the Church.

- Imagine telling a potential story to a stranger on a train. Would it interest them or might it primarily be of interest to people in the Church, perhaps even people in one area of the Church? If so there is a case for aiming for coverage in the Christian media and on outlets such as the Church's own website, CrossReach News, social media or the Good News newsletter which congregations can download from the Church's website for potential integration with their own newsletters.
- Is the story genuinely new and fresh? To use the cliché, dog bites man is not a huge story whereas the reverse would be.
- The mainstream media might still be an option. Perhaps the story could be approached in a different way to make it resonate with the general public. Many press releases are written from the perspective of senior figures in an organisation. E.g. "Rev John Smith is representing the Church at an interfaith conference in Middlesville." The trick is to lead with the aspect most likely to interest/matter to a stranger. E.g. "Leading figures from faith groups meet tonight at a conference to discuss a potential mass petition in the wake of the atrocities in the Middle East."
- Research or a survey may secure news coverage for an issue. It can be quick and relatively inexpensive to ask e.g. Mori to simply add say three questions to the regular weekly wide-ranging survey it does. Survey Monkey is less expensive but has more modest status. Media organisations such as BBC Scotland have a policy of not considering any survey with a sample size of less than 1,000 in Scotland.
- A strong statement is worth considering on an important issue. This has to be done with care as it can affect the long term reputation of the Church and relations with partner organisations. It is essential that any criticism is well researched and does not align the Church with any political movement.
- A case study -which may take days to find - can greatly increase the chances of coverage on TV in particular. Media organisations regularly do decide no case study no coverage. It would be hard for example to persuade a broadcast organisation to carry a comprehensive report on increasing numbers of vocations, if it were not offered an interview with a fledgling minister.
- Stories may emerge from committees or work handled in offices. However, some stories, especially people-centred ones, often come from people at grassroots level.
- Some issues may not work as news stories but are potential features or opinion pieces.
- Forewarning the media of a scenario which lends itself to a good photograph can help secure coverage for a tentative story. It could result in publication of the image with an extended caption or if lucky an article. For example children or adults bearing candles may be a natural part of an event and offer a potential strong image.

- To increase the chances of coverage it is advisable to have the press release approved by all in the afternoon, e.g. Monday, ready to go out at 09.30 on Tuesday but embargoed for 00.01 (early hours of Wednesday). This gives reporters and news desks on newspapers enough time to notice and consider the release before the key meeting with the editor, picture desk etc. at about 11am on the Tuesday. It also gives TV and radio staff enough time to notice and organise a brief interview for the following day's breakfast bulletins.
- Putting a reasonable story out with an embargo until the morning also means a chance it will get space on BBC and STV websites and feature on Good Morning Scotland, media platforms good in themselves and which can set the agenda for the day for the rest of the media. TV people also more likely to bite if they have time to set up filming. Evening TV news programmes only have about six full reports (setting aside sport) so competition is often stiff. There is less competition for space on breakfast bulletins. Sometimes a story will get on at breakfast but be edged out of evening coverage. STV has local opt-outs for e.g. Edinburgh and Glasgow areas, on its evening news programmes so has space for some stories that might not make it on the BBC.
- An event staged in the afternoon or evening has to be very strong indeed for it to be picked up as editors have to reserve a hole in the paper or kick out stories already completed. A meaty statement distributed under embargo for use on the day of an evening event, often offers the best chance of coverage.
- Special days offer "pegs" – "excuses" for coverage. E.g. an event or the anniversary of a death/birth/launch/discovery. For example the General Assembly in May provides newspapers with a peg for articles on issues affecting the Church.
- There is much to be gained by anticipating or noticing developing news e.g. a high profile debate or new government figures on health or homelessness. It is essential to put any statement out quickly as otherwise competition may crowd the Church's voice. This is a link to forthcoming government figures and reports: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/03/18798>. They are usually released at 9.30am. It is advisable to ring fence time to look at the executive summary with a view to releasing a statement by around 10.30am. An invitation to do live or pre-recorded broadcast interviews may follow so it is important to anticipate the need for a spokesperson to be available that day.