

HANDLING THE MEDIA IN A CRISIS SITUATION

A useful definition of a crisis is “A situation that puts your organization’s values on trial in the court of public opinion” (William N. Curry, Public Relations Society of America).

If an allegation has been made within your local church, you may find yourself in a crisis situation. The goal in crisis communications is to recognize potential situations early and deal with them proactively before they reach crisis proportions.

The South Georgia Annual Conference has a written crisis communications plan that the bishop, cabinet and conference staff are trained to implement. If you know of a pending allegation that has been made, please contact your District Superintendent immediately. Your District Superintendent will then activate the proper channels to put the conference crisis communication plan into action.

The following are some helpful tips in dealing with the media when they call.

HANDLING TELEPHONE CALLS FROM REPORTERS

- Take a written message (don’t transfer to voicemail without taking message)
- Get reporter’s name, media outlet, direct phone #, and deadline
- Ask for a topic of story
- Explain that the designated church spokesperson will return the call
- Don’t answer questions yourself
- Be polite, but firm
- Keep a log or written record of media calls

“HOLD RESPONSE”

“I want to make sure that we give you the most accurate and up-to-date information. Our conference communicator (or appropriate person) can best help you. If you give me your contact information, deadline and topic that you’re calling about, I’ll have that person return your call as soon as possible.”

SAMPLE MEDIA POLICY FOR A LOCAL CHURCH

It is the policy of (fill in name) United Methodist Church to provide accurate and timely information to the news media and public, consistent with the provision of The Book of Discipline. To ensure clear and consistent communications with the news media, all staff should direct questions and inquiries from the news media to (fill in job title).