

Crisis Communication Plan
The Presbytery of Carlisle

Background and Purpose

Communicator William N. Curry once said, “Crisis is a situation that puts your organization’s values on trial in the court of public opinion.” A crisis can be good as well as bad for an organization, but no matter what the outcome it is sure to challenge and change people and organizations. A crisis attracts media coverage and becomes a pivotal point for the way organizations operate in the future. A crisis is more far-reaching than just an organization as its events affect families and communities. Alan Griggs, a former director of media strategy for the United Methodist denomination, identified five common components of a crisis: 1) Crisis usually comes suddenly; 2) Adequate information and key leaders are not always available at a time of crisis; 3) Every crisis provides its own opportunity - early - to position the organization as it would like to be understood; 4) Each crisis has a life cycle; and 5) All crises tend to impair judgment and clear thinking.

The Presbytery of Carlisle consists of fifty-two particular congregations, staff, minister members, educators, commissioned and non-commissioned lay pastors. Our ministry area encompasses a diverse, populous, complex, environment that includes military supply facilities and training schools, a nuclear reactor, an intricate system of highways and bridges, an airport, colleges/universities, and governmental structures. As a part of the presbytery’s Communication Initiative and Strategy, this crisis communication plan has been developed to address the need to respond, and to create a framework for implementation of this plan in the event of a crisis situation.

Being proactive in our preparation before a crisis occurs, minimizes stress and confusion for staff while maximizing competence, courtesy and pastoral care for those involved and for the entire community. Additionally, a crisis communication plan assures that crucial information will be delivered as timely and accurately as possible considering the circumstances. The intent will be to support the integrity of the ministry, which the Presbytery of Carlisle is called to provide.

This crisis communication plan is designed to create a process for Presbytery staff in a crisis situation involving some aspect of the presbytery, e.g. the Presbytery staff, the community or the greater church. As part of the connectional church and its ministry, our presbytery is ready to assist congregations as well as our subsidiary and affiliate bodies (Synod, Lend A Hand, Presbyterian Homes) when a crisis arises using the principles in this crisis communication plan.

1 **What We Hope to Accomplish**

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3 The Presbytery of Carlisle, through this policy, seeks to establish a concise system of
4 communication that can be implemented in the event of a disaster of any magnitude, either
5 natural or caused by humans. Our goals are as follows:

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7 ❖ To ensure, to the best of our ability, the safety of all the people in our churches and
8 throughout the Presbytery;
- 9 ❖ To communicate truthful information in as timely a manner as possible in order to
10 avoid rumors;
- 11 ❖ To share information with the media as appropriate;
- 12 ❖ To provide spiritual nurture to those in our care in order to reduce stress to the extent
13 possible
- 14 ❖ Through the crisis, to serve as a faith witness to the people of our community.

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16 Our intent is to: (some suggestions to consider)

- 17 - reinforce our role as a ministry of compassion;
- 18 - react to crisis in an open, direct, accurate and truthful manner;
- 19 - enable sensitive and timely responses;
- 20 - assign communication responsibilities;
- 21 - provide staff with communication skills for relating to our congregations, local,
22 community and the media; and
- 23 - minimize potential liabilities.
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Crisis Communication Implementation

<u>Crisis</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Responders</u>	<u>Timing and Information Released</u>	<u>Target Audience for Information</u>
Natural Disasters			First 48 hours	
	Hurricane	Pastor(Moderator)		To all congregation members.
	Tornado	Clerk of Session	1. Preliminary assessments of facilities and people	To other affected congregations
	Fire			To the community via news media
	Flood		2. Integration with local authorities: police, PEMA, FEMA, volunteer teams	
	Windstorm		3. Status of interrupted programming	
	Blizzard		4. Central contact person: name, location, contact methods	
	Earthquake		5. Schedule for future updates	
Human Disasters			Scheduled updates	
	Epidemic		1. Recovery efforts to date	
	Pandemic		2. Re-located and rescheduled events	
	Vandalism		3. Requests for prayers, financial assistance, volunteer help	
	Arson			
	Burglary			
	Explosion			
	Act of War		Final report	
			1. Status of recovery efforts	
			2. Thanks to the community for their support	
Criminal or Legal Crises		Pastor(Moderator)	At time the action becomes public	To the affected congregation
	Lawsuits	Clerk of Session	1. Acknowledgment of suit or action	To the media, as appropriate
	Terminations of staff		2. Upon advice or counsel, do not discuss the case further	
	Sexual harassment		3. Identification of spokesperson who will represent parties of interest for future contact	
	Sexual misconduct			
	Criminal acts by			
	Staff or members			
			At the conclusion of action	
			1. Release summary of judgments	
			2. Express thanks, patience, understanding and forgiveness, as appropriate.	
Acts and Demonstrations		Pastor(Moderator)	During event	To all congregation members
	Terrorist acts	clerk of Session	1. Nature of situation, who is involved, issues of conflict, status of events	To the media. As appropriate
	Public demonstrations		2. Roles of church members and local safety authorities	
	Bomb threats			
	Hostage situations			
			Immediately following event	
			1. Outcomes of issues, agreements reached	
			2. Progress and scheduling of future meetings, as needed	
			3. Concluding observations	

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Personnel Crises	Pastor(Moderator) Clerk of Session	A letter to the congregation announcing announcing the resignation. Cite reasons only if appropriate. For injury or hospitalization, release medical authorization.	To the congregation via pulpit announcement
Resignation			
Termination			
Injury			
Hospitalization			
Pastoral Crises	Exec. Presbyter	As near to event as possible Expression of sorrow, care and compassion. Concern for family.	To the congregation To the media, As appropriate.
Mental, Emotion stress			
Killed			
Death by suicide			
Perception Crises	Exec. Presbyter	Issuance of clarification statements	To all Presbytery churches for their distribution to members.
Misunderstanding re: Presbytery action			
Systems, Financial or Positive Crises Exec. Presbyter	Exec. various committees	To deal with the crises and to report to the Presbytery of the findings and conclusions.	To the Presbytery, en banc.
Denominational Crises dissolution request	Exec. Presbyter	Notify the General Assembly, Presbytery Legal Counsel, Coordinating Council Request creation of an Administrative Commission to oversee the congregation during a period of negotiation and reconciliation.	Appropriate internal individuals and Committees. Respond to media via Legal Counsel.

Media

Crisis Response Team

The Crisis Team will consist of the Executive Presbyter, the Stated Clerk, the Associate for Communication & Office Management, the Moderator of Presbytery and the Presbytery's legal counsel (if needed and invited.) Any one of the members may convene the crisis team. Pastors or Sessions of local churches may request assistance from the team in times of crises. In the event that all members of the team are unavailable, the Synod will implement its plan.

When appropriate to a particular crisis, upon recommendation from the crisis team, the crisis coordinator will invite others to join the crisis team. For example: Chairperson of the Committee on Ministry, additional media consultants or legal counsel, Associate for Congregational Care.

The names and contact information for current members of the Crisis Team and other Presbytery staff will be held at the Presbytery office, at the homes of all members of the Crisis Team, and by the Synod.

Responding to the Media

The following media guidelines will be followed so that the crisis communication plan can be implemented effectively:

Ordinarily, the Executive Presbyter is the spokesperson for the Presbytery.

The Associate for Communications & Office Management will be responsible for maintaining a biography and photo of each Presbytery staff member as well as a lexicon of church terminology and appropriate fact sheets, which may be provided to the media.

During a crisis, the Associate for Communications & Office Management ordinarily will serve as media coordinator. As such, this associate will serve as facilitator, acting on requests for information and comments, providing the media with logistical support, checking information for correctness before its release, and monitoring the media for accuracy.

The Associate for Communications & Office Management will also maintain a media log throughout the crisis. The log will include a listing of all media calls received, issues raised by the media, and media coverage of the crisis.

The Associate for Communications & Office Management will also be responsible for keeping copies of all documents prepared and distributed to internal and external audiences throughout the crisis and will maintain a file of final reports.

Depending upon the particular crisis and time constraints, the crisis team will make appropriate use of communication tools such as in-person contact, telephone, fax, e-mail, website, newsletters, regular mail, and express services.

45 Whenever practical, communications with both internal and external audiences are to contain
46 the key messages identified by the crisis team.

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48 Relating to the media in a cooperative manner is an important element of the crisis communication
49 plan. The crisis team, especially the spokesperson, needs to follow these basic principles in
50 maintaining positive media relations that the media coordinator has established:

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- 52 ● Be accessible and accommodating to the media
- 53 ● Avoid delaying responses to media requests, unless absolutely necessary
- 54 ● Answer all questions directly and briefly as possible, in a straightforward manner
- 55 ● Respond to questions factually and not in a reactionary or defensive manner
- 56 ● Do not argue with reporters, and never speak “off the record”
- 57 ● Avoid speculation and allocation of blame
- 58 ● Provide supplemental information in the form of fact sheets
- 59 ● Do not use the church and ecclesiastical jargon without a clear definition/explanation
- 60 ● When an answer is not available, explain the reason and offer to respond within a specific
- 61 time frame
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1 **Evaluating Crisis Communication Responses**

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3 **Post-Crisis Evaluation Criteria**

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- 5 ● Was the Crisis Communication Plan adhered to by the Crisis response
6 team?
7 If not, where did they deviate and was that deviation appropriate?
 - 8 ● Was the communication appropriately responsive to the crisis? If not, how
9 could it
10 have been changed?
 - 11 ● Did the communication meet the stated goals for responding to a crisis as
12 outlined
13 in the beginning of the Crisis Communication Plan?
 - 14 ● How could stress/confusion have been minimized?
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16 **Post-Crisis Evaluation Procedure**

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- 18 ● The Evaluation Team shall consist of the Crisis Communication Task
19 Force and a representative of the Crisis Response team.
 - 20 ● The evaluation shall take place within sixty (60) days of the crisis.
 - 21 ● The Evaluation team shall determine any changes that need to be made to
22 the Plan and recommend them to the appropriate body of Presbytery
23 within thirty (30) days of the post-crisis evaluation.