



MEDIA RESPONSE STRATEGY

"If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed, if you do read the newspaper you are misinformed." (Mark Twain)

Why should I be involved?

- To correct misconceptions
- To give a positive balance
- To share the 'Good News' and get known
- To add the 'Adventist' advantage
- Because the story will still be reported on one way or another

Why the media may contact you?

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church is becoming better known in this country there is an increasing likelihood that a representative of the media may contact you. These will come principally in three categories.

- 1) When there is a crisis. (*Your church has burnt down, a member has been arrested, etc*)
- 2) When they spot a human interest story. (*A Pathfinder march, opening a charity programme, a significant anniversary, dignitaries attending a function, activities that are 'different', etc*)
- 3) When they are researching for a programme idea. (Documentaries, reality TV shows, debate programmes are often looking for individuals from diverse backgrounds)

There is one further category, that of you contacting them, when you believe that you have a story or event that would be of interest to them. However, that is not part of this specific strategy.

What to do when the phone rings:

IN A CRISIS

(Contact by a journalist)

- **Be friendly and helpful.**
- **Ask** who is calling and what organisation they represent.
- **NEVER** say "No Comment". It means you have something to hide.
- **Buy some time/slow down.** "Give me 20 minutes and I'll get back to you".
- **Get the facts you need.** "What information do you need?" "How much detail do you need?" "What angle are you following with the story?"
- **Always consult higher.** Who should be aware of this story? Who has the facts? Ask the Conference/Union Communication department for advice.
- **Ask** who is the best spokesperson?
- **Get back to the reporter.**
- **ALWAYS** meet your deadline.

FOR A PROGRAMME REQUEST

(Contact by a researcher/producer)

- **Be friendly and helpful.**
- **Ask** who is calling and what organisation they represent.
- **Gain** an understanding of what the programme is about. Will it be confrontational or exploratory? Reality TV, documentary, debate. Are there samples you can see?
- **Never** make a commitment on the spot. Take some details and promise to get back to them.
- **Consider** if the programme will enhance or detract from the image of the Church.
- **If positive, consider** if you are the best spokesperson or whether there are others who may be more knowledgeable or experienced.
- **Always consult higher.** (Pastor, President, Communication director).
- **Then get back to the researcher.**
- If selected (and just because they called you does not mean it will happen, **Prepare, prepare, prepare!** Research as much as you can ready for your appearance.

Interview techniques:

- Prepare message points of the 3 main things you want to say.
- Focus on your answers whatever the question.
- Look for Sound Bites (they may use less than 20 seconds of your interview).
- Avoid the negative.
- Be cautious in your speech. If you don't say it they can't report it.
- Use a "bridge" of some sort. (*"It is sad my church burnt down but I just want to say a real thank you to the local community for the support they have given."* *"I am devastated that my house was burgled but I know the struggles that some of these folk go through, and as a youth worker, if I can help this young man in any way, I want to be available."*)

When commenting to the media deflect hard-hitting initial questions and firmly take control of the situation. On a crisis story:

- Offer condolences (where appropriate)
- Refer to action to be taken
- Give reassurances
- Give an indication of the scale of action to be taken
- Deflect blame (where appropriate)

A few tips:

- Reporters, researchers are just doing their job.
- You are the expert.
- You can control the interview.
- Keep on the subject using message points.
- Please note that these are very brief tips and while helpful should not replace talking to an expert. Your Communication director and President are there to provide helpful and additional advice.

