

Media Manners: Helpsheet on Approaching & Responding to the Media

Example: Lincoln and Grimsby District

If you have a breaking story in your area, or need advice, don't forget our press officer, Robert Lawe. His e-mail is robert.lawe@lgmethodistdistrict.org.uk, 01482 348122 (tel/fax) 07821 181005 (mob). Bob has worked with the media for over 25 years. Bob writes:

(1) 'Anyone who is going on the Radio or is being interviewed by the media - let me know for two reasons - firstly, I can offer help, secondly, if a story is about to "blow" then I need to know the background in case I am approached by the nationals. (Don't worry about 'thought for the day' or 'paper reviews')

(2) 'If sending a press release then it would be useful to have a copy of the release sent to me with a list of to whom the release has been sent to. This is so that I can gauge where the release has gone to and whether I think other media should have the details that are on my extensive list (I have over 300 media contacts).'

General Advice from Shine

If contacted by the Media for comment **make sure you know**

- The name, organisation and telephone number of the person you are talking to. If you don't know the organisation already, ask about their audience; age, reach, characteristics.
- What programme (if radio) or section (if newspaper) will the item be appearing on and when is it likely to be broadcast/published.
- What format will the item be taking - news, package, feature, interview - and what angle will the journalist be taking on the story.

Never make a comment without this background information. Then ask if you can have 5 minutes thinking time and phone them back. (This puts you in control.)

Thoughts before you make a comment:

- Prayerfully - ask god's help
- Audience - who are you speaking to and how will they best understand what you want to get across. Think analogies (parables) Think word pictures (especially for radio).
- Subject/context/implications - what and who are you speaking about and why have the media asked you to comment?
- KISS - Keep it short and simple: think key phrases and simple constructs.
- Always make it clear who is making the comment - are you bringing your own view, that of your congregation, or that of the wider Methodist Church. Ministers beware; delineate between your own opinion and that of the wider Methodist Church.

Never say 'No Comment' - instead, say, 'Can I get back to you?' Or 'when do you need this by?' ('No Comment' could infer that you have something to hide.)

Press Releases

- Decide how many you will release for a particular event and when - eg Church Craft Day, (2), Searchlight:6T, (4), Just10 Lincolnshire (3 on build up, 1 every week for 10 weeks). Hence, press releases can be weekly bulletins.
- Send press releases by e-mail and follow up with a phone call to check it has arrived.
- Make press releases short and punchy - Title and first three lines should say it all, rest should expand on a theme.
- Whilst facts and figures can emphasise the scale of an event, there is no substitute for personal comment - a couple of quotes from people involved can be very useful.
- Break the stereotype of Church - ie elderly, traditional, tea drinking and cake baking. Focus on what is newsworthy and everyday - perhaps focus on an activity within the norm which is different and exciting.
- Avoid wherever possible 'in house' language that is used by the Church but rarely understood by anyone else - find other ways of communicating sensitively. For example, 'evangelism' becomes 'encouraging people to think about faith', or 'the christian faith'.
- We live in a secular society - understand that articles which are 'preachy' or begin to recite the gospel are unlikely to be published.
- A picture of people with smiling faces is always helpful - get permission from everyone - simply tell them where the picture will go, and for simplicities sake, do not include children. (There are ways you can do this - ask me for advice if you need it - I would advise strongly a signed 'model release' form that outlines where the pictures will be circulated.) It is possible to be creative when taking pictures so that the faces are the children are not visible, but you can still see what they are doing.
- Use example press releases offered by Christian Aid/fundraising packs as a template - or look at the reports written by Shine on the Lincoln and Grimsby District website.

Getting to know your media

- Be conversant with you local/community newspapers; radio and television stations: who their target audiences are, what their political persuasions are/the key foci; the lead writers/reporters, editors etc.
- Most media organisations will be delighted to welcome you and your members through their doors - you are, after all, their customers. Phone up and arrange a visit.
- Be active - make yourself known to the editor(s). Send out press releases on events in your patch; be Good News-wise - how can you relate God's message to what is happening in your locale - how does it relate to the audience and the way they see the world.
- Sound-bytes and succinct phrases which sum up any view of an issue are gold dust to any editor.

Contacts:

<http://www.lgmethodistdistrict.org.uk/district/default.asp>

<http://www.lgmethodistdistrict.org.uk/district/content/newsarchive.asp>

Click on news archive (left) or current news (Methodism in our Madness (right) for exmaples of press releases. The community media association www.commedia.org.uk