

PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICY
of Denver Presbytery

Adopted August 25, 2002

REPRESENTING THE PRESBYTERY AT PUBLIC EVENTS

When the Presbytery is invited to have a representative present at public functions such as a Habitat House dedication, validated mission event, community worship service or other public event, the Moderator of the Presbytery (or his/her designee) shall ordinarily represent the Presbytery.

RELATING TO THE MEDIA IN TIMES OF PRESBYTERY/CHURCH CRISIS

- 1) A time of crisis may be
 - personally focused on a Minister of Word and Sacrament, an Employee or a Volunteer of the Presbytery (*i.e.* sexual misconduct of a pastor, accidental death, legal action, target of violent act, charges of discrimination, misuse of funds, officiate of same-sex marriage service...) or
 - institutionally focused (*i.e.* confidential information disclosed, theft and vandalism, fire, sexual misconduct by employee/staff, presbytery funds missing, offices picketed, bomb threat, natural disaster, homosexual orientation of prominent staff...)
 - denominationally focused on actions of the General Assembly or other governing body of significant public and media interest.
- 2) Ordinarily the stated clerk shall serve as the primary spokesperson for the Presbytery. At least one alternate spokesperson shall be identified. This person could be the Moderator of Committee on Ministry, the Presbytery Moderator, Presbytery Pastor or other person identified by one of the above. If the stated clerk is unable to perform this function, the moderator of Presbytery, the Moderator of the Committee on Ministry, and the Presbytery Pastor shall confer with each other and determine who shall speak on behalf of the presbytery.

The spokesperson shall:

 - ✓ anticipate and meet the needs of the media
 - ✓ manage the message
 - ✓ ensure that inaccurate or misleading reporting is corrected immediately.

All spokespersons shall speak with one voice and consistent message.
- 3) When accusations are made or charges are brought against a Minister of Word and Sacrament, a presbytery staff person or volunteer, all requests for information received by pastors, sessions, elders of local churches or church staff shall be referred to the Presbytery spokesperson.
- 4) At the time the crisis is known, the spokesperson shall confer with those who have pertinent information to determine content of initial public message which may be followed by an "official statement" about the crisis.

Initial public message should

 - ✓ Avoid "no comment" as much as possible
 - ✓ Explain why, if something can't be discussed,
 - ✓ Address process to be followed
 - ✓ Avoid any statement that either condemns or condones the actions of an accused person

Official statement should

 - ✓ Give basic facts as openly, honestly and quickly as possible (without exaggeration or speculation). Say what is necessary and no more.
 - ✓ Outline actions being taken to respond to the situation
 - ✓ Outline actions being taken to prevent a similar crisis in the future
- 5) The spokesperson(s) should be accessible to the media to avoid the media going to other sources for information (which may be incomplete, inaccurate or inappropriate); treat media personnel with professional courtesy.

- 6) The primary spokesperson and all alternates shall receive training in
- ✓ Making immediate, initial public response (during first 90 minutes of an unanticipated or anticipated crisis)
 - ✓ Meeting the needs of the media and handling a media interview
- Guidance as to the best ways to respond to a media inquiry will be provided for those answering the telephone.



RELATING TO THE MEDIA DURING A TIME OF COMMUNITY, NATIONAL OR GLOBAL CRISIS

At a time of community or national crisis or disaster, or even in response to an event beyond our national borders, it may be appropriate and helpful for the Presbytery to make a public, pastoral response. Ordinarily, the Presbytery Pastor would be the person to issue any such pastoral statement.

RELATING TO THE MEDIA AT OTHER TIMES

Since most initial contacts with the media will come to the Presbytery office, the stated clerk or presbytery pastor shall determine if the request for information/comment or response should be referred to the Presbytery Moderator, other appropriate persons, or answered directly, as the situation suggests.