



MEDIA RELATIONS: BEST PRACTICES FOR CONGREGATIONS

An important element of congregational communications is building good relationships with media and influencers who write stories and cover events in your city or region. Reporters and writers are not interested in talking to you only when there's a crisis or something controversial happening. They also want to hear the great stories about your congregation and how you make a difference in your community.

How to cultivate media relations

Depending on the size of your congregation, either a staff member or a volunteer from the congregation should research the media in your area. Get to know the reporters and assignment editors at newspapers, TV stations and radio stations in your coverage area. Don't forget to include digital versions of newspapers and local magazines.

If possible, try to arrange an in-person meeting to introduce yourself and your congregation to reporters and editors. Talk with them about the types of stories they cover and are interested in covering. As those relationships with media are cultivated, you'll be considered a trustworthy resource for reporters.

Although this may take a little time in an already busy schedule, building these relationships with the media can prove invaluable. Not only will you have contact information for the media to pitch your events and activities, the media outlets will consider you a good resource for an interview during newsworthy events and stories happening in your city or state that may have an impact on your congregation, the ELCA churchwide organization or our global companions and ministries.

Consider creating a congregational policy for dealing with requests from the media for information in noncrisis situations.

- a. Establish who on the staff can respond to reporters' calls immediately.
- b. Determine what information can be given by anyone on the staff (confirming the spelling of a name or a title, numbers who attend worship, calendar information).
- c. Establish a protocol for notifying other members of the staff that a reporter has contacted the church.
- d. Be proactive in providing good news story tips to the media in the community.

THE MEDIA OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY:

- to inspire and invigorate your current membership;
- to introduce the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to nonmembers and grow our membership; and
- to increase awareness of the mission and ministry of the ELCA and how your members are carrying out that work in your community.

Methods to engage with the media

Press release

A press release will help you share information with the media about congregational events or activities. These events may include:

- a milestone event such as a congregational anniversary;
- an ordination;
- service events such as “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday; and
- multicongregational, ecumenical or interfaith events.

A press release is written in the style of news coverage, as the story you would like to see written after your media event has taken place. It should read like a short article, with data and quotes that will be easy for the media to use in their reporting.

In contrast to a media advisory, which provides only basics, a press release generates a story that journalists can use to inform their writing.

[This might work for daily newspapers, but for any other publication the best practice is to send the release a month in advance and follow up two weeks before the event.]

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY? ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER.

WHO: Who are you? Who from your organization is participating?

WHAT: What is this event all about? What is the anticipated impact in your community?

WHERE: Provide information of where the event or activity is taking place.

WHEN: Provide the date of event.

MOST IMPORTANTLY WHY? Why is this event important for your congregation? Why is this event important for your community?

Press release template



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

First Lutheran Church to celebrate 120th anniversary

[Insert your city, state abbreviation, and release date] – First Lutheran Church will celebrate the 120th anniversary of its congregation during a service of thanksgiving May 1 at 11 a.m.

Located at 120 Main St. since its construction in 1898, First Lutheran has been regarded as one of the foundations of this city's downtown district. The congregation has weathered many changes to the area and recently opened a day-care center and food pantry to serve the changing neighborhood.

“We are so excited to celebrate our congregation’s anniversary with our community,” said the Rev. John Doe, pastor of First Lutheran. “For the past 120 years, our congregation has served our neighbors by sharing Christ’s love with our community. All are welcome here.”

The public is invited to attend the service, which will be followed by a community meal in the congregation’s fellowship hall.

[Add general information about your congregation]

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of “God’s work. Our hands.,” the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA is rooted in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

For information contact:

[Insert name]

[Insert phone number and email where media can reach you]

[Insert your congregation’s website and social-media info]

Media advisory

A **media advisory** is a **one-page description of a future event**. It is an exclusive invitation with just the most important details. A media advisory is usually **NOT for public consumption**. It gives the facts, listed clearly, without interpretation or introduction. Think of it as an invitation that answers only the five important questions: **Who, What, Where, When and Why**.

The advisory should be sent at least **five days before the event** and must be newsworthy. Be sure to catch their attention.

Media advisory template



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Media advisory

WHO / WHAT: The Rev. Mary T. Smith, pastor of St. James Lutheran Church, will join with local faith leaders in a walk to end hunger and poverty among vulnerable communities in Chicago.

WHEN: Tuesday, July 10, at 10 a.m.

WHERE: City Food Pantry
100 N. State Street
Chicago, IL

WHY: St. James Lutheran Church is committed to supporting sustainable solutions that address the root causes of hunger and poverty.

Reporters interested in an interview with Pastor Smith should contact [church communications staff contact info].

About XXX Lutheran Church:

[Add general information about your congregation]

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Social media

As part of a unified communications strategy, a social-media presence will greatly enhance your congregation’s visibility among your members and the community. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram can play an important role in communicating your congregation’s events, activities and updates.

[Check out](#) the ELCA’s digital and social-media guidelines, best practices and communications tools.