

## CONTACTING MEDIA FOR YOUR CHURCH

You tell your community about your church's events and activities by contacting local media and providing them with information. The following basic steps will assist you in making contacts.

1. **Dig!** If it seems like nothing is happening or being planned that is suitable for media coverage, be a reporter and *dig*, by phone and E-mail, by reading church bulletins and newsletters, checking with the pastor and board members, and looking through the church calendar. Ideas will pop up in amazing places. As a church Communication Leader, you can also suggest projects or events. If you make a suggestion and the church decides to follow your suggestion, ask to serve on the committee for the project or event so that you will be kept informed on progress. By keeping media possibilities in mind, you can give further input that will help make the project media-friendly.
2. **Story Angle and Lead Sentence** need to be fresh, interesting and geared to your community's demonstrated interests in order to grab the attention of busy editors. Humor helps. In order to know what your community is interested in, it is vital that you regularly read local paper(s) and check local broadcast news reports. By researching the area, you can help shape your story to be relevant and timely in your local market.
3. **Compile a list of media contacts for your church area.** Start by visiting newsstands around your church, finding what daily and weekly papers are sold, and purchasing a sample of each. These contain phone numbers that will help you determine which to editor or reporter you should send your church news. In some areas, the local Yellow Pages, library, Chamber of Commerce or the city/town Web site may include local media information for your list, or a number to call that may lead to more information.

As you build your list, make time to begin calling editors and reporters, introducing yourself as the communication leader for your church. Ask them what their deadline schedule is and if they have any guidelines for church releases. As you make media contacts aware of your presence and alert them that you will be sending information, remember to keep calls brief. Make morning calls before 11 a.m. and afternoon calls no later than 3 p.m. Even if you call during those hours, it also helps to ask if you are calling at a good time in case they have an emergency. Again, keep calls brief and to a minimum!
4. **Timing.** Begin your media-contact work in your church, well in advance of an event: Do whatever you need to do to get *confirmed* information you can share with media. Your advance work will help you get accurate information in time to meet media deadlines. Be especially prompt with upcoming holiday event news.
5. **Call-Backs.** Once you have made the contact(s) or sent in your release, check with your contact(s) to learn if they need any additional information. If you find that an event date or time has changed, or an error was made in the release, that will inconvenience the public, or be embarrassing for the church, call the editor and tell them you need to submit a revised release. Then E-mail, fax or hand deliver the release, noting at the top right that it is a Revised Release - Replaces Previous Release, or whatever your contact suggests.
6. **Vary the media and editor/desk you approach, depending on your event or topic.** In some cases, news about a seminar on Christian financial planning or stewardship, e.g., may be of interest to a business reporter. Some event news may work as a radio or television P. S. A. instead of, or in addition to an event notice or interview option.
7. **Power source for communicators: 1 Thessalonians 5:17.**