

What makes a good story? Telling your story.

Good stories are the basis of effective communications that can engage your audience and get your church noticed.

There will be plenty of interesting stories like this in your parish or church. This guide will help you identify them and start sharing them with others.

Matthew 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

What makes a good story?

- **Something new** or a 'first', e.g. 'Church launches new youth café amid 'Quiet Revival', or 'Church is first in the diocese to go completely Net Zero.'
- **Something novel/unusual**. A story that goes against the grain of people's expectation will encourage them to pay more attention and learn more. For example, a vicar delivering a sermon on a Sunday isn't a story because it is the norm. Whereas, ' Vicar wins a reality TV show' or 'Vicar abseils down church spire for charity', is a story as it's more unusual.
- **Something human**. People relate more to stories about other people than about organisations. Thinking about people in your congregation, do any have unusual or interesting stories of how they came to faith? Is anyone in your church community doing something interesting, like climbing all the highest peaks in Europe to raise money for the church or local charities? These human stories can help attract interest and communicate your church values.
- **Something local**. People enjoy reading or seeing stories about places that are familiar. A good local story may have a clear call to action for the local community to get involved. For example, 'Local community encouraged to donate winter clothing to village church to support newly-arrived asylum seekers.'
- **Something that links to a wider national story**. Does your story serve as a local example or case study for a widely-debated national topic? Regional news outlets are always looking for local examples or spokespeople that speak to the big topical stories that are leading the national headlines.
- **Something visual**. A strong image can make your story much more impactful and help it get noticed, especially for people scrolling news and information on their devices.



How to tell your story

- The building blocks of a story should contain the 5Ws: **What** is happening? **Where** is it happening? **When** is it happening? **Who** is involved? and **Why**? If you are sending the story out to your local/regional press, ideally the 5Ws should be covered within the headline and opening paragraph.
- **Who is your audience?** Think about who the story is for, as this will determine the messages you emphasise and even the type of language you use. If you are trying to reach an external audience who have little knowledge of the church, avoid ecclesiastical terminology or concepts that may be unfamiliar to non-churchgoers. Keep your messaging simple.
- **Drafting your story.** Try and distil your story to the **three main messages** you want to communicate. Think about whether your story helps you achieve your goals. Does it get across what your church community is like and its values? Is there a call to action for the reader or viewer? Aim to write a catchy headline that also sums up the story, e.g. 'Vicarage to double up as homeless shelter as cost of living crisis worsens this winter' OR 'Church takes over local swimming pool as baptisms treble in just one year.'
- Where relevant, aim to **include a quote** within your story that gives a personal account or first-hand experience of whatever it is you are wanting to communicate.
- **Communications channels.** Which channels you use to get your story out there will be determined by the audience you need to reach. Here are just some examples: **Internal audience** (congregation) - Sunday church notices, newsletter, private Facebook group. **Local community** - Local Facebook pages (and other social media platforms), local paper/TV/radio station, parish magazine. **Local families** - Church school newsletter, flyers in libraries, baby groups, local leisure centre, parent influencers. **Young people** - Instagram reels, TikTok, posters or fliers near the local secondary school, coffee shops, etc.



Speaking to journalists

Dealing with the media, whether proactively (pitching your story) or reactively (they approach you for a comment or story), can be daunting if it's something unfamiliar. Here are some key tips to remember when engaging with journalists.

If a journalist calls you:

- Ask for more information on the story they are writing and how your church fits in. Is the church the main part of the story or is this a wider, more topical story in which the church is an example?
- Ask them what they are looking for. Are they looking for a written statement, a live or pre-recorded interview, or just some facts and statistics to inform their story?
- Ask them what their deadline is. Is it urgent or do you have more time to think or consult with others and prepare a response? When will they publish/broadcast the story?
- Make sure you take their contact details – name, media outlet, phone number, email address if you need to get back to them.
- Never provide a statement 'off the record' to a journalist. This can be high-risk, especially on sensitive topics, as there is no guarantee a journalist won't report your comments. Only issue or say something if you are comfortable with it being in the public domain.
- Speak to the Diocesan Comms Team if you have any concerns at all.



If you are approaching the journalist:

- If you are sending a story to a journalist or speaking to them, draft a short email or verbal 'elevator pitch' that briefly summarises what the story is and why it's relevant to their audience. For example, if it's a local paper, emphasise the local nature of your story, how the community is involved, any event that is open to the local community, fundraising for local charities, etc.
- If possible, research the name of the relevant journalist so you can personalise your email or call rather than just addressing 'newsdesk'. They will be more likely to pay attention if it's directed to them and doesn't look like it's been emailed to many other competing outlets.
- Ask them if they need any further information to make the story even more relevant for their publication.
- Send through an accompanying image to make your story more eye-catching. Make sure the file isn't too large to avoid it bouncing back or going into the journalist's spam folder.

Giving a media interview



- When deciding whether to give an interview, firstly check with the journalist/producer how long the interview will be, whether it is a one-to-one with a presenter/reporter or whether other people are being interviewed too. Also do a bit of research into the programme to understand the tone and style and what sort of angle the journalist may take. Check if the interview is live or pre-recorded.
- If you do the interview, remember your **three key messages** and try and communicate at least one of those messages from the very start to set the tone, and to boost your confidence.
- Use plain English and avoid jargon and acronyms.
- If speaking to a more secular audience, avoid complex religious terminology or concepts that may not be familiar. As you would with sermons, make your message relatable and easy to understand by all.
- Use anecdotes, stories, imagery or symbols, as Jesus did, to support your key points.
- If it's a TV interview, be aware of your body language. Find a comfortable stance so you feel and look more relaxed, and wear clothing that's comfortable but not likely to distract the viewer from the substance of the interview.
- Let your personality come through. Don't be afraid to be yourself in an interview and treat it as a conversation. Sounding overly rehearsed or overly corporate will not make a compelling interview.
- Allow time to prepare for a media interview and be clear on what you want to achieve from it, e.g. more people knowing that your church is welcoming of people seeking to understand Christianity, or more people knowing about the positive work your church does in the community. Also prepare for any possible tricky questions or curveballs that could come up.
- Don't be afraid to watch or listen back to your interview (if available on catch-up platforms). It may help you identify any room for improvement for future interviews.



For further advice, support or training on storytelling and dealing with the media, please get in touch with the [Diocesan Communications Team](#)