

## ***Be Prepared to Speak to the Media***



Make sure all leadership and membership know who is the designated spokesperson for the church and have all media inquiries directed to the designated spokesperson.

When possible, the spokesperson speak in “soundbites\*” that respectfully convey the area of concern and hope for the situation. (Soundbites are the audio equivalent of a catchy newspaper headline ie: brief, interesting, fully contained thoughts and typically no longer than 5 seconds.)

Media interviews can offer the opportunity for a healing experience and may help advocate for a cause. Be an honest, warm, and non-anxious presence. Make your take-away message hopeful and compelling.

Most mainstream media, when covering a disaster, are interested in the human- interest aspect of the story. Remember that you're appealing to the broad masses so use language that everyone can understand. Show ways that the community can come together.

Consider and convey the impact of the situation. Describe what you (or your congregants) are going through. Are there physical or emotional struggles? What's been the hardest? Are there long-term implications?

When you can, paint pictures to make it real. Use stories and analogies to aid in the description. For example, instead of saying '70 feet', you can say, 'the size of a tractor trailer truck'. When appropriate, use words that highlight your message: “the key point is” or “let me emphasize that...” At the end of the interview, summarize your main points.

In most situations, it will be very appropriate for you to talk about your church as a unique part of a community effort and to share ways that the viewers, listeners, or readers can help. Include a website so people can get more information.

It's important to realize that there is no such thing as “off the record” and that anything you say may be used in the story.

Consider the questions you may be asked, before you're asked, so you're prepared with responses.

You can also put together a 1-sheet with some important points, a quote, specific ways to help, and contact information. If you're speaking to a group of reporters or if you are among a group of speakers, identify yourself by name.

In general, the media is very respectful of the sanctity of the church. On rare occasions when there is a sensational story and they want to cover officiated activities, they may need to be asked to observe from a distance. Usually this can be facilitated through leadership positioned at the door(s) of the church.

Dress appropriately for the event. If you're mopping up after a flood, jeans are more appropriate than your Sunday best. Avoid wearing white on-camera. Avoid narrow stripes...they tend to zag or flutter on camera. Avoid flashy jewelry or bold patterns.

Disaster recovery is often long-term. There will likely be needs long after the sensational story. Consider the angles for continuing coverage. For example, “Mother appeals to public for help” or “It's been a year since...” If a fund has been established or a memorial park has been dedicated, those would be appropriate causes for coverage.

For more preparedness information, please visit [Disaster Ministries - Maine Conference United Church of Christ \(maineucc.org\)](http://maineucc.org).

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