



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

Media Relations - Writing a Press Release

A clear, well designed press release is one of the most popular, cost effective ways of conveying information to the media and ultimately communicating with the outside world. A well written press release with a considered message will grab the attention of the reader in the first paragraph by including the five W's: **Who? What? Where? When? Why?**

Journalists receive hundreds of press releases each day and are constantly put under pressure by Editors to produce the highest possible number of columns in the shortest amount of time. This can be used to your advantage – a clear, well written and easy to use press release is a gift to a hard-pressed sub editor with spaces to fill 10 minutes before the deadline.

What is 'Breaking News'?

To make sure that your press release stands out from the crowd it must be 'news' worthy. The clue is in the title – the news must be new! An event which happened a week ago will be of no interest to the journalist, so send out your press release as soon as you can. The media are looking for quirky or unexpected events, so find an 'angle' for your story and make sure it is clear to the journalist what your story is about. If you can place your story in a recognised, contemporary context you may be able to gain topical relevance.

Don't forget the catch-phrase KISS: 'Keep It Simple Stupid'.

Consider your audience

Send your press release to the newspapers whose audiences will be interested in reading your story. Local media are interested in community news on a geographical basis, however your story may be of interest to a specialist audience, e.g. Christians who read The Church Times. If you are not sure, read your local paper to get a feel for the types of stories they like to publish. This will help you to decide whether your story is right for them and whether or not your desired audience will be reached.

You will also need to establish media contacts by ringing the relevant radio, TV and print media and asking for the name of the journalist who you can send your story to. This will give you a chance to introduce yourself and also prevent your news story falling into a generic email box e.g.

newsteam@nqe.com.

What should be included in your press release?

- Make sure your press release is dated so that journalists know to act immediately. If your press release is embargoed you will need to state the date / time of when it can be used.
- Give a simple, punchy headline that will grab the attention of the media.
- In the introduction briefly summarise the story (who, what, when, why and how) and keep it relevant to your audience.
- Place the facts of the story in descending order of importance.
- Try and provide quotes, if possible, from someone relevant to the story. This will help add colour to the story and make it come alive.
- Paragraphs must be kept short and concise – try not to use more than six paragraphs.
- If there is a photo opportunity, make sure you mention it.
- Any other additional information relevant to the story e.g. biographical information, interview opportunities and facts and figures can be included at the bottom of the press release under the heading: **‘Notes to Editor’**.
- Provide full contact details (name, telephone numbers and email) so that you can be reached any time during the day.

Sending the release

- Send it as soon as you can. An event which has been and gone will be of no use to the journalist – its old news.
- If you are inviting a reporter/photographer to your event give them at least 1 weeks’ notice.
- Include a punchy description of the press release in the email subject box to grab the journalist’s attention.
- You don’t need to send a photo with your story to the journalist, just make it clear what is available and be ready to send as a jpeg.
- To make your story more sensational the journalist may be tempted to re-jig your piece, so be prepared to answer any questions carefully should the paper or magazine call you back to “check a few facts”.
- Make a list of journalists who are interested in covering your story. If you forget to take the name and number of the journalist you can find out their details by visiting www.journalisted.com/list.
- If you haven’t heard back from the journalist follow up with a phone call. If your story hasn’t been used, find out why – this will be useful when sending out your next press release.

And remember...

- Avoid jargon and church-y language e.g. Episcopal Areas. If you must use acronyms, explain them in full the first time you use them.
- Keep it short – 1 – 1½ sides of A4 at the max.
- Make sure you obtain authorisation to issue the press release or act within authority.