

Promoting your good news stories – a guide to getting started

These guidelines aim to help you think about how to put together a press release to get media coverage for your good news stories.

If you're not sure about any of this, remember you can speak to Dave, Communications Officer, at any stage of the process for help or advice. You do need to give us all your information from the start – dribs and drabs are very unhelpful. Do remember that there are many demands on the very limited time of the DCOs and at the point you contact them they may be dealing with another big story or crisis. It is therefore very helpful if you can give as much notice as possible of any upcoming stories.

1. Work out what your story is

Journalists get hundreds of people each week contacting them with stories: why should they be interested in your story? Of course, you know the reason why your story is the most interesting – but you need to “sell” it to the journalists.

If you're unsure about how to approach this, have a look at stories in the publication you are targeting – how are they presented and what interesting angles are picked out? This should help give you some ideas.

Here are some ideas about why stories make the news for different reasons:

What's in the news?	Why is it news?
Whale spotted in the River Derwent	Unusual
Bird flu arrives in Cumbria	People need to know or take action about it
Mayor of Cumbrian town fined for foul language	People want to know about it
Carlisle United win the FA Cup	Of interest to lots of people locally
Junk food ban in Cumbria schools	Important

2. Check all those involved are aware

When you've decided what your story is, make sure the people involved in it know that:

- a) you are sending their story (after all, that is what it is) to the media, and
- b) they should expect the media to contact them to ask more details about the story.

You should also contact Dave to let him know you are working on the story, so he can be ready to send it out to the media for you.

3. Think about timing

It's often better to make news than it is to make history. If you've a big event or initiative planned, it is usually better to try to publicise it beforehand than it is afterwards. If you do want to promote something after the event, it needs to be as soon as possible afterwards – the press just won't be interested if something is two weeks in the past by the time they hear about it.

If you want the Communications Officers to help with this, be sure to give plenty of notice.

4. Think about the information that journalists and readers need to know

The basic principle is to bear in mind that journalists and readers are intelligent but uninformed, so you will need to summarise the basics of the story very succinctly and in an accessible way.

Your news release should answer these seven questions, where appropriate, at least. You could use this grid to help you set out this information, so the press release can be planned.

who?	
what?	
where?	
when?	
why?	
how?	
how much?	

Now you've worked out the key points of the story, you can use the press release template in Appendix 1 to draft it out.

Some tips:

- Write the press release in 'top-down' style – this means the most important information should come at the top, then should be relayed in descending order of importance. If a journalist uses a press release, they will start editing from the bottom, so you need to make sure the important information comes first.
- If you're using acronyms or abbreviations, you should spell out their full names the first time they are used.
- Don't forget to include contact information – so journalists can come back to us to ask further questions and to get more details.
- Don't use jargon - remember that the journalist isn't likely to be an expert in the technical terms, customs or practices of the Church. If you really need to use jargon, explain what it means.
- Use some quotes – these can add colour and life to a story, although they should not be used for giving key details.
- Think about any appropriate photographs you could include or opportunities for press photographs that you could set up.

5. Forward your draft to the Communications Officers

Send your draft to: communications@carlisle-diocese.org.uk

Dave, our Communications Officer, will:

- check your draft and let you know of any changes that need to be made before the release is sent out
- send the final version to the agreed media contacts
- be available to take calls from journalists looking for more information, if appropriate
- advise you on any potential issues that may arise, if appropriate
- brief you on how to give a good interview, if appropriate

Appendix 1: Sample press release

News from Carlisle Diocese [date you want it to go public] For immediate release

SPECIAL SERVICE TO REMEMBER CHILDREN

A special service for people who have suffered the death of a child at any age will be held at Blanktown Church, South Street, Midshire, on Sunday afternoon (April 18) at 3.15 pm.

The one-hour service is for anyone who has suffered the loss of a child at any stage of life, from conception, through pregnancy, during childhood or in later life.

Revd Doreen Spinto, Vicar of Blanktown Church, said: "The service is for all those affected by a child's death either recently or many years ago.

"We have designed the service as an opportunity to reflect, remember or mourn. Each child will be remembered as an individual of unique value."

During and after the service, prayer will be available on request for those attending. Children are welcome, and childcare will be provided.

More information from Revd. Doreen Spinto on 01234 223344.

Ends

More information:

Revd. Doreen Spinto on 01234 223344

John Frazer 01234 223344 (wk) or 01727 134561 (hm)

April 5 20xx