THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF ARIZONA
CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN
For Churches
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Crisis Communication Policy
The Episcopal Diocese of Arizona recognizes the importance of communication in creating and maintaining trust with our stakeholders. Clergy, churches, parishes, lay leaders, the media and the public are among the many groups who rely on a foundation of mutual respect and trust with us. The following plan is designed to assist us with maintaining effective relationships and public trust in the event of a crisis.

Purpose of This Plan
This plan provides a process for communicating information Diocesan-wide during crisis situations.

Types of Crises

- A natural disaster that affects the community.
- The physical destruction of church plant or property, either from a natural disaster or purposeful intent.
- Illegal, scandalous or otherwise publicly questionable behavior by a clergy member, staff member or parishioner.
- Allegations of sexual misconduct by a clergy, staff member or parishioner.
- A community tragedy with regional or national impact

While this list is non-exhaustive, we encourage our clergy, staff and lay-leaders to think through the possible conditions, threats and sensitive matters that might impact our Diocese and churches, and to regularly consult and practice this plan. Doing so will result in the best possible level of preparedness, especially in situations for which there may be no other preparation.

How to Use This Plan
To get the most out of this document, and to be prepared in the event of a crisis/disaster:

1. Form a Crisis/Disaster Preparedness Communications Team.
2. Complete the blank planning sections of this plan found in Appendix B. Use this section of the plan as a foundation for creating a crisis/disaster communication plan.
3. Conduct regular (e.g. annual) meetings and trainings with Preparedness Communications Team members to review and practice plan.
4. Conduct practice drills involving a mock scenarios that “stretch” the skills and thinking of Preparedness Communications Team members. For ideas, see Appendix E.
5. Debrief and update plan at Preparedness Communications Team meetings. Updates may include team members, phone numbers or lessons learned from previous drills.
Forming a Preparedness Communication Team

Duties and responsibilities of the team may include:

- Communication within the diocese pre-disaster (i.e. trainings, preparedness, etc.)
- Build relationships with/liaise with other ecumenical, non-profit and governmental agencies
- Organize preparedness trainings
- Preparedness planning – creating plans and mapping assets for parishes and for the diocese
- Manage communications systems throughout the diocese during disasters

Consider the type of people to include on the team – characteristics may include:

- Enough time to work on this ministry, especially during a disaster (not all members can be emergency response professionals!)
- Positive energy and the ability to work collaboratively
- A self-motivated “details” person with strong organizational skills
- People that represent all geographic regions of the diocese
- Clergy and lay people
- People with diverse backgrounds – personally, professionally and in ministry experience
- Relationships with key ministries to vulnerable people

Procedure for Communicating at Crisis Onset

1. FOR EMERGENCIES: DIAL 911

2. At crisis onset, call the Bishop’s office at (602) 254-0976. If the call is after hours, you will be instructed where to call.

3. The Bishop’s office will connect you to the Canon to the Ordinary or other available staff member. If no one is available at the time of the call, you will be informed of who will call you back and by when (if known).

4. If needed, the Bishop’s office will assign a staff member to serve as a liaison between the parties involved and the Bishop’s office until the situation is resolved.

5. If you receive a media inquiry: The Canon for Media and Communication will assist as needed with release of information, updates or a statement. Channels may include the media, social media, the Diocese’s e-newsletter or a written statement.

6. The Bishop’s office will maintain contact through the liaison until the situation is resolved. The liaison will communicate to the Bishop or other appropriate staff member(s).

7. The Bishop’s office will keep a permanent record of the situation on file. Situation details and records are kept confidential.
Communicating During a Crisis/Disaster (General Guidelines)

It is the practice of the Bishop’s Office to take the following actions in the event of a crisis:

1. Collect the facts prior to releasing a statement.
2. Work with affected parties and/or individuals to formulate a statement.
3. Release information via statement in any of the following media: traditional news outlets; social media platforms; Diocesan communication vehicles or other channels as appropriate.
4. Follow up with affected parties and/or individuals throughout the duration of the crisis/disaster period and take appropriate next actions.

It is recommended churches’ Preparedness Communication Teams take the following actions:

1. Implement communication plan (see Appendix B for link to a blank plan that can be used by individual churches).
2. Maintain contact with Canon for Media and Communication for guidance with message development and dissemination (eg talk to Nicole prior to posting updates on Facebook).
3. Maintain a positive attitude and communicate as often as possible (if appropriate) with members of the congregation re: updates, next actions, opportunities to assist, etc.
4. Keep notes throughout the process to update communication plan and develop a “lessons learned” file.
Appendix A: Preparation Checklist

Episcopal Relief & Development offers basic and comprehensive planning guides for churches. To download, click the link below. The PDF file can be found on p. 2 of the Resource Library: http://www.episcopalrelief.org/press-and-resources/resource-library

Look for:

Bronze Level Preparedness Planning Guide
Silver Level Preparedness Planning Guide
Comprehensive Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations
Appendix B: Debrief Checklist and Report

Name of person completing report: _______________________________ Date: ______________

Describe the Incident: ____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 = totally unprepared; 10 = totally prepared) assess team’s preparedness: ______

Areas our team performed well: _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Areas our team needs to improve: ___________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Actions we will take/practice for next time: _________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Changes we need to make to our plan (if applicable): _________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C: Sample Response Statements

For members of the media calling for a statement, if a designated spokesperson is not available:

“Thank you for calling about ______ (incident). I apologize, but at the moment _____ (church contact) is not available to speak with you (or is out of the office). May I take your name and number and have him/her return your call? (church contact) should be available to return your call by ____ (time).”

For members of the community calling, if a designated spokesperson is not available:

“Thank you for calling about ______ (incident). I apologize, but at the moment _____ (church’s contact) is not available to speak with you (or is out of the office). May I take your name and number and have him/her return your call? Thank you …”

For spokespersons talking to members of the media, please remember:

- Nothing is ever truly off the record.
- Do not say “no comment” – if you don’t know the answer to the question or do not have the facts, it’s acceptable to say you don’t know, that you will find out and you will get back to them.
- Be prepared prior to the conversation – have your facts organized, keep a notebook nearby to jot down questions or note afterward what you said, name and contact information of the reporter, etc. Do NOT wing it! Come to the call with the main points you want communicated (preferably written out in advance so you can refer to them).
- Do not speculate – stick to the facts.
- Take your time during the interview – listen to the question, clarify if needed, don’t be afraid to take your time answering the question.
Appendix D: Practice Drills and Mock Scenarios

Crisis/Disaster Scenarios

The following are possible crisis/disaster scenarios your church may face. We encourage you to use these or write your own familiar local scenarios to practice planning and implementing your church’s crisis/disaster communications plan:

1. An uncontrollable fire is sweeping through the community.
2. A heavy rainstorm has caused flooding, destroyed homes and made roads impassable.
3. The office and kitchen section of your church has caught fire. Repairing and restoring the building is expected to take 6 months.
4. An ice storm or heavy blizzard has paralyzed your community.
5. A bombing has occurred in the business district of your community.
6. A train carrying nuclear waste has derailed and released its contents into the air and water supply.
7. A trailer park that serves low-income residents has closed, displacing 100 residents who now must find comparably priced housing.
8. A unit of National Guard members – all from your community – has been killed in a military assault overseas. More than 50 families in your community have lost close relatives.
9. The power in your community has gone out and is not expected to be restored for 72 hours.

Questions to Ask Your Team:

1. One week after event: What is your disaster leadership team working on?
2. Two weeks after event: How do you determine who is still in need in your community as a result of the event?
3. If your church was affected: How will you protect church property in this scenario?
4. First Sunday after event: How have weekend worship services been impacted?
5. Two weeks after the event: How is the church responding?
6. If your church was impacted: Where are church activities happening one week after the event?

7. Three weeks after event: How will you work with non-church partners to respond?

8. If church members were impacted: how are you determining people’s needs days after the event?

9. Long-term disaster: What is your church doing 3 months after the event? Is this a new ministry or an extension of previous ministries?
Appendix E: Links to Helpful Resources

General Disaster Preparedness

Episcopal Relief & Development: http://www.episcopalrelief.org/press-and-resources

FEMA:  www.ready.gov

American Red Cross: www.redcross.org


Worship & Ministry Resources


Ministering to Children After a Disaster:

Ministering to Youth After a Disaster:

Ministering to Teens After a Disaster:

Ministering to Adults After a Disaster:
APPENDIX F: COMMUNICATION PROCESS FOR CHURCHES

1. **Receive Situation details.** Get caller's name and phone number where they can be reached.
2. **Emergency? Call 911**
3. **Call Bishop's Office** (602) 254-0976
4. **Provide details to Bishop’s staff member**
5. **Media Inquiry? Talk to Canon for Media & Communication**
6. **Assigned Liaison will report back to Bishop**
7. **Church works with Liaison during crisis**
8. **Bishop's Office assigns Liaison**
9. **Liaison maintains contact with Bishop until resolved**
10. **Diocese Communications Team meets to debrief, update crisis plan**
11. **Bishop's Office keeps permanent, confidential record**
“So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober …”

- 1 Thessalonians 5:6