

# EXTRA! EXTRA!



Upper  
Susquehanna  
Synod  
Communications

## Media Relations Guide for Congregations and Synod Ministries



*Material Compiled by Chad W. Hershberger  
First used in Headwaters, 2010-2011*

## UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD COMMUNICATIONS

**Mission Statement:** *To promote a positive image of the Upper Susquehanna Synod through comprehensive communications.*

The Upper Susquehanna Synod Director of Communications has the responsibility for providing public information about the synod and for establishing a public image that reflects the true and positive nature of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA. An important aspect of this goal is media relations. This booklet provides a guide for those relations. Please read the material and distribute within your ministry as necessary. If you need further assistance or have any questions, please contact me.

Chad W. Hershberger  
Director of Communications  
Upper Susquehanna Synod

[news@uss-elca.org](mailto:news@uss-elca.org)



## Synod Publications

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There are five main publications the Director of Communications is responsible for editing and distributing. These five publications are *Currents*, *USS Ark*, *Headwaters*, *Stream of Information*, and the synod website ([www.uss-elca.org](http://www.uss-elca.org)). They are primarily distributed through a service called *Constant Contact*, which the synod has a subscription to. This service allows us to manage an electronic mailing list and create electronic newsletters. We have just under 500 contacts in this system, about 160 of them rostered and other leaders.

**Currents** is the monthly electronic newsletter that goes out to synod constituents (rostered and lay members, other ELCA partners, interested parties). The deadline for *Currents* is the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. An MS Word version, a PDF version, and a plain text version are posted on the website. Individual articles are also posted on the website. *Currents is not usually published in June.*

**USS Ark** is the monthly print newsletter that is sent to *Currents* contact list. It usually contains information about congregational mission and ministry projects. It is published in a PDF file and is posted on the website. *USS Ark is not published in July. A special edition of USS Ark, under the banner of Stream of Information, is published in July. That edition contains highlights of Synod Assembly. At times, a two-month, combined edition of USS Ark may be published.*

**Headwaters** is newsletter for rostered folks and other ELCA partners. It contains information about them and for them. The deadline for *Headwaters* is the 20<sup>th</sup> of month. *Headwaters is not usually published in June or December.*

**Stream of Information** is an occasional piece that is produced as warranted. It features an emphasis on one single topic.

**USS-ELCA.ORG** is the synod's website. It is updated as needed and at least once a month.

*Feel free to submit information to be included in these publications to be distributed to the congregations of our synod.*

- Start a free e-mail account that can be used by the congregational reporter to send news releases. You can get such an account at google.com or yahoo.com. Or, use the congregation's existing e-mail account if the congregational reporter can easily access it.
- Create a media list. The easiest way to do that is to contact Chad Hershberger, director of communications for the synod, and request his media list of all the outlets in our geographical area. Tailor your media list to your local area.
- At each Congregational Council meeting, spend a few minutes brainstorming what items to publicize of your congregation's ministries. Often, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Review your congregational bulletins and newsletters for story ideas.
- Ask your outreach/evangelism committee to make a list of all the interesting ministries/events of the congregation. This list should not just include fundraisers and social events to publicize, but what are the noteworthy items the congregation does?
- As you are doing all this, remember these types of PR Stories, which may help you as you think of stories to submit to the media:
  - *Bread and Butter PR* is a term invented to refer to the basic news items or announcements which you should do on a routine basis. The purpose of *Bread and Butter PR* is to keep your name in front of your public. Examples include: hiring or promoting employees, major grants received, expansion or relocation, awards or honors your congregation, or volunteers receive.
  - *News Stories* have a time value and are often related to specific events that are worth repeating. Many news stories may be anticipated as you plan your year. You should allow time between big stories so that the media will be more interested.
  - *Feature Stories* are human-interest-type stories focusing on people. If you work doing PR year-round, you should plan twelve feature stories, one to send out each month. Try to tie your stories to national or local happenings, economic trends, or something else that is already considered news.

## Read all about Jesus in Your Local Media

*One of your goals as a congregation should be to tell the story of how your local church reaches out to the community and spreads the love of Jesus Christ. A good way to do that is to develop a relationship with your local media.*

*The news media is defined as newspaper, radio, television, magazine, and on-line reporters, editors, and other personnel. These individuals report news and feature stories to the general public through their medium. You must remember that these individuals represent for-profit businesses. They are not an exclusive public service and are under no obligation to present any news item in the form it is given to them. That is, they may refuse to print or air stories submitted or they may edit items to fit their particular needs. It is important when dealing with the media that you do so in a professional and courteous manner.*

Some ideas for stories that the media might cover about your ministry:

- Stories that drive the news include these type stories: tragedy or disaster; new or first of; different/unique/out of the ordinary; benefit/human interest; or scandal/controversy. Be prepared if your congregation faces tragedy or controversy for the media to do a story. Promote your stories that are unique or have big human interest value.
- Newspapers love seasonal stories beyond the traditional holidays. Tell how your church is celebrating events like Reformation or Super Bowl Sunday. Invite a few radio and newspaper reporters to a celebration you are holding at your congregation.
- A profile on a program you are running at your location or a new initiative you are undertaking. Or maybe it's something that's changing to an existing function in your church.
- Anniversaries are often covered. It may be members of your congregation celebrating a 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary or even your congregation's significant birthday.



## Things You Should Do When You Have News

- Make a list of the details. Answer the journalistic questions who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- Make sure your news item has relevance, impact, timeliness, or novelty. Ask yourself the question, “Do people really want to know about this?” Just because you think it is important, do you think the general public will also think it’s important?
- Write a news release. Remember that the following are types of news releases widely published (in order of usage); so you may again want to make sure you are writing something newsworthy:
  1. Consumer Information
  2. Coming Events
  3. Research Items
  4. Timely Topics
  5. Past Events
  6. Features
  7. Institutional



- Consider a photo for your story. When looking at

newspapers, readers are seven times more likely to look at pictures and read their captions than they are to actually read print copy. Because of this, the use of photos is critical, as is the use of quality captions. Remember that action photos work best and definitely have photos with people in them. Your caption should be between two and four lines long, identify the people in the photo and state one of your key messages. It’s important to have a signed photo release from those pictured before you send the photo.

### Editorial vs. Advertising

Content that is controlled by the media-- including news and feature stories, radio and television programs, opinion pieces and columns written by journalists and the public-- are considered editorial copy. There is no fee for editorial copy and no opportunity to review or approve the copy printed or aired.

Content presented as an advertisement or commercial is developed by the advertiser and presented in time/space purchased by that individual. Fees are established by the media but the content is controlled by the advertiser.



## 5 KEY ELEMENTS TO A GOOD INTERVIEW IN A CRISIS:

**M**essages- what you want to get out  
**U**nderstood- simple language  
**S**hort, Simple, Sensational  
**I**nteresting- to the public and why?  
**C**redibility- this should be high



### Putting it All Together

*Here are a few tips for how you can put all the information you’ve gained through this series together, into an effective media plan.*

- Consider who in your congregation has gifts for writing. Then, ask them to become the congregational “reporter.” They can write news releases for the local media and perhaps get to know your local reporters. It would be a good idea for the congregational reporter to share their copy with the pastor before it is distributed.

at the scene, too. Parameters/rules should be set at the beginning, telling photographers what is restricted territory. If you don't do that, they will go out on their own and may hinder your operations. If the incident is taking place in a building, designate where the media can and cannot be. Tell them that they have to be escorted if they want to go to other areas of the building. Don't forget the little things. Make sure that blinds are closed in the building where the action is, or pictures might be taken!

3. Establish a media team. This should include the pastor and church leadership. During the crisis, have one official spokesperson. All requests for information from the media shall be referred to the spokesperson.
4. During the peak of the incident, news conferences should be held hourly. The spokesperson should **STAY WITH THE SCRIPT!** Don't allow the media to have the spokesperson make decisions on the spot. You don't want to feed them everything, but don't lie either. Make sure that what you tell the media won't hinder your operations at the scene of the incident. In addition, a back-up person should be with the spokesperson when a briefing is given. That person can pull the spokesperson away if things get out of hand. During the news conference, mention the next briefing time. Don't forget to give the media respect and they will respect you back. Even if there is no news to report, you should hold a scheduled briefing and tell them that. At the end of the crisis, those in authority (such as emergency personnel) can address the media.
5. One person should be responsible for writing all the information that is given to the media. The **pastor and/or council president** should be responsible for proofreading all information and approving it. These individuals should verify all information and be credible as credible can be. The media would rather not get any information as opposed to the wrong information. Statements should: be true and accurate; be brief, with a commitment to facts and no interpretation of those facts. The initial statement may be released to the media by the church--without prodding--in order to avoid accusations of a cover up. Such statements should include: location, time and type of incident, who was involved (children or adults, no names until all have been notified.); not be issued before parents/next of kin are informed (in cases of accident or death).
6. Have someone, like the church secretary, coordinate support help. This would include security, counseling, and backup efforts. Also, that person can call on those who have experienced similar situations to tell what to expect and what you might be missing. One person should be answering the main church phone number. That person **SHOULD NOT** answer any questions from the media but rather take down names, phone numbers and fax numbers and tell the person someone will return their call. Any news releases that are issued should be given to the personnel answering the phone. If they can answer the questions with information from the release, they can do so. A phone script should be developed as to what to say. For instance, "I have a news release that I can read to you over the phone."

## Write all about Jesus for Your Local Media

*One of your goals as a congregation should be to tell the story of how your local church reaches out to the community and spreads the love of Jesus Christ. A good way to do that is to develop a relationship with your local media. And, the most common form of getting information to the media is the news release.*

*Writing a news release is not a mystery. In fact, getting a good news release out to your media list is quite simple, once you know the format. Remember, news releases are designed for the media; no one else is interested in your information presented this way.*

Things you should do in the preparation of a news release:

- Determine your primary message.
- Be sure your news release tells a complete news story, answering the journalist questions who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- News releases are typically no more than one typed page long.
- Write a strong summary lead putting the most interesting news first- most significant or important.
- Amplify the lead (each of the elements introduced- expand upon)
- When writing, use the inverted pyramid style, which means put the most important information first and the least important information last.
- Write short sentences and paragraphs and use common language (avoid technical terms)
- Avoid empty or unnecessary words and clichés.
- Use ACTIVE verbs. Avoid PASSIVE verbs.
- **Double space or 1 ½ space if you can.**
- **Double check all your information- EVERY FACT, TIME, DATE, PLACE, ETC. MUST BE ACCURATE!**



## Reasons News Releases would be rejected:



- Poor Writing (see the tips above to help)
- Incompleteness (make sure you answer the 5Ws and H)
- Inaccuracies (double check EVERYTHING!)
- Poor Timing (sometimes there is more important news. Try to send it out when you know it will be a low news time- holidays and weekends are typical)
- Little Local Angle (local news outlets like it to be relevant to their listeners/readers)
- Past Events (makes sure you send out news releases in a timely fashion or make it sound current)
- Features (media like hard news stories over soft news features)
- Institutional News (media are more likely to publish stories that are not just about what you do all the time)

**How to “Write Good”:** Style is something you will develop as you write more news releases. A good rule of thumb is, “Never leave a question in the reader’s mind.” **Always have someone else read over your release before it is finalized**, and read it out loud to yourself as well. If you stumble over phrases, rewrite it to make it sound more conversational and understandable.

### Where Should Your News Story Go?

You should send your news release to a variety of media in your area. Send it to your local newspaper, local radio stations, as well as the local television stations that cover your area. You are probably a consumer of information from many of these sources.

You can also send your news release to church publications. The synod has a publication *USS Ark* that regularly publishes stories of our congregations in action. In addition, you could submit your news release to *The Lutheran* magazine.

The Director of Communications keeps a current media list for our synod. You can request one by e-mailing [news@uss-elca.org](mailto:news@uss-elca.org)

## Being Ready for a Crisis

*Having a media relations plan in the event of a crisis is important. In a crisis, you have both danger and opportunity. A crisis (such as a fire at your church building, a sudden catastrophe such as an outbreak of illness following a church dinner, a natural disaster or a death) is temporary but will cause you to feel like everything is falling apart. To top it off, the media may cover such events as described above. To avoid confusion and anxiety, have a media plan in place that you can put into play if such a crisis occurs. Understand that the media has a job to do. They will want to get the story and they will get it at all costs. Therefore, take the stance that you will help them with their job. If you don’t, they’ll use any means they can to get their story. It is better to feed them the information than have them “go behind your back” and hinder your efforts. Here are the steps you should follow:*

1. Control access to the site of the crisis. Curiosity seekers should not be allowed there; only those persons directly involved, including police, media, relatives, and medical personnel will be allowed in that area.
2. Set up a NEWS MEDIA AREA (NMA). This area should be near the scene of the action, allowing photographers to get their needed shots. It should NOT be near the command post. The NMA should have access to multiple telephone lines for use by reporters and be equipped for comfort. This would include restrooms nearby, beverages and food if a long period of time elapses. Hospitality helps a great deal when dealing with the media in these situations. Time should be set up for the media to take pictures

**The Ambush Interview** is the spontaneous interview without much warning. It may involve reporters awaiting your arrival or your exiting from a building or meeting. It is crucial to remember that you have specific rights:

1. Pause to allow yourself time to assess the situation and break the reporters momentum.
2. Extend your hand for a greeting and introduce yourself.
3. Request the name and affiliation of the reporter.
4. Advise the reporter of the time limits available for the interview.
5. Request that lights and microphones be at a distance that will not be intrusive or uncomfortable for you.
6. Do not talk “off the record.”
7. Stay away from statements like “no comment.” These give the impression of guilt or attempting to hid information.
8. Keep the interview short and perhaps offer assess at a later date through your office.
9. Maintain the interview on the topic at hand.
10. Remember, you have the choice not to do this interview. When you have made the introduction, advise the reporter that the time does not permit the interview but “please call my office and perhaps we can set up a time for an interview ”

Substantiate your key messages with facts. After delivering the 10-12 word quote, back it up with examples, anecdotes, case studies, statistics, and third party references.

Make sure your key messages are newsworthy. They should be timely, unusual, draw on the “heart strings,” have impact, be helpful, or deal with trends or upcoming events.

**EXAMPLE:** Your congregation is hosting a Mission Mall this holiday season. You get a reporter to come interview you, the pastor, about the event. You jot down the following key messages and at every chance during the interview, you reiterate these three key messages:

- Mission Mall is an alternative gift-giving program, encouraging folks to take consumerism out of their Christmas celebration.
- St. Robert’s Lutheran Church is committed to encouraging their members and the community, especially children and youth, to help others who are less fortunate.
- Projects like these are important to this church because we are committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ by showing love in action.

Always make sure a key message talks about your mission and doing God’s work through our hands!



Here is a sample news release:

## UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, ELCA

### NEWS RELEASE

State that this is a news release at the top. Can use your letterhead to make it look more “official” if you are going to mail or fax it.

**Contact:** Chad W. Hershberger, Director of Communications  
Phone: (570) 713-5826 E-Mail: [news@uss-elca.org](mailto:news@uss-elca.org)

Always list a contact person. This line makes the editor’s job much easier. This is the person the media will call to get further information. Always list the best way to contact that person.

**For Immediate Release: May 21, 2009**

Always write a headline. This helps catch editors eyes and gives them a quick knowledge of what the story is about.

This line is needed on every news release. You must list when the information can be used. Typically, you write “For Immediate Release,” meaning the media can use it when they get it. Date it, too.

### Tour De Revs Coming to Upper Susquehanna Synod

**LEWISBURG-** The Tour de Revs (TDR) is coming to Union County!!! The Tour de Revs is an effort by three Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) pastors to raise money and awareness for ELCA World Hunger. The three pastors, from West Virginia, are biking in all 65 Synods in the ELCA this summer on a three-person bamboo bicycle.

They will be in the Upper Susquehanna Synod on May 4, 2009. Their schedule

At 3:00 p.m., the three pastors, they, will start their 17.

Lutheran Church, Millmont to the Upper Susquehanna Synod Office in Lewisburg (Route 192 and Reitz Blvd). They expect to be at the synod

The first sentence is your lead. It’s the most important sentence in your news release. It should grab the reader’s attention and tell the most important and most recent information about your story and sum up the whole story.

Use a dateline. That is the place where the story originates. It is used to give the story extra significance by showing that it comes from your area.

office around 4:00 p.m. When the 3 pastors arrive at the Lewisburg synod office, they will be greeted and welcomed at around 4:15 p.m. when there will be a photo opportunity with USS Bishop Robert L. Driesen. They will also be available for news media interviews at that time.

Following the event at the synod office, the three pastors will be transported throughout the synod for potluck meals and presentations about their journey. Their schedule includes:

6:00 p.m.- Potluck dinner and TDR cyclist's presentation at Christ Lutheran Church, Milton (1125 Mahoning St.)

6:30 p.m.- Potluck dinner and TDR cyclist's presentation at St. Luke Lutheran Church, Sunbury (501 Catawissa Ave.)

7:00 p.m.- TDR cyclist's presentation at St. Luke Lutheran Church, Williamsport (1400 Market St.)

All events are open to the public! Canned goods donations encouraged at evening events in congregations. The TDRs will be staying with synod members overnight and then traveling to Reading on Friday morning. The pastors are Rev. Reinold "Ron" Schlak Jr., Rev. Frederick "Fred" A. Soltow Jr. and the Rev. David A. Twedt. All three serve ELCA congregations in West Virginia. They hope to raise \$5 million in this endeavor.

Information about Tour de Revs is at <http://www.tourderevs.org> on the Web. The site includes an inte

-30- is a journalistic symbol, used in broadcast style, to mean the end of the story. Sometimes (###) or the writer's initials (CWH) are used. It tells the person inputting the story that there are no more pages.

The Upper Susquehanna Synod, of 65 synods of the Evangelical is made up of 137 congregation Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, Tioga and Union Counties. For more information on the synod and its congregations, visit the [www.uss-elca.org](http://www.uss-elca.org)

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*In the body of your news release, make sure you tell a complete news story. Use quotes from those involved and remember to introduce the quote with a transition, which in news writing is a sentence in its own paragraph, which sets the reader up for the quote. Choose carefully who you quote because the news media will probably want to interview them. You probably will want to develop one standard paragraph about your church which you end most news releases. This is referred to as "signature information" and will help unfamiliar editors (and ultimately readers) know who you are.*

## The Gospel is Key in Telling Your Story

*When using the media to tell your story about what is going on in your congregation or new ministries starting up, it is important to use the opportunity to spread some key messages about your organization, in this case, the church. Key messages are the short themes you want the media to report. When you talk to news reporters, any of your answers or comments can be quoted. Because the journalist will edit these comments, you never know which quotes will be reported. That's why you need KEY MESSAGES.*



Create short, memorable 10 to 15 second responses and comments in the vernacular.

That way, you can tell your story to the media in a focused way that's both lively and impacting.



Be descriptive and paint vivid word pictures. Boring, tedious comments are a turnoff to reporters and their audiences. Jargon creates barriers.



Keep your messages to no more than 10-12 words. This creates good soundbites.



Prepare one to three key messages and deliver those messages during your interview with a degree of consistency. Don't worry about sounding repetitious-- simply change a word here and there, but maintain your theme in delivering a message.

### What about submitting photographs?

- Captions and photos are called "points of entry," the thing that catches the reader's eye and makes them read an article.
- Know that readers are seven times more likely to look at pictures and read the caption than read print copy.
- Make sure you submit high quality photos.
- Action shots work best.
- Avoid pictures with lots of people in them. Instead, have a photo that you can see the people. A good rule of thumb is that people's heads should be no smaller than a nickel.
- When you submit a photo, write a suggested caption for the photo. If you physically send in the picture, tape the caption to the back. If you submit a digital photo, send a caption with the e-mail.
- Ideally, captions should be at least two lines long and no more than four lines. Identify the people in the photo and use the opportunity to state one of your key messages.
- Make sure you have a signed release from the people pictured in the photo that says you have permission to use it to publicize your church, free

- Use short, crisp, strong sentences that convey conviction or emotion with vivid images. Use specifics, stories, anecdotes, contrasts and comparisons.
- Avoid technical language. Speak in layman's terms.
- Spell difficult words and names and repeat figures.
- When answering questions, try to avoid long-winded explanations. Speak in "headlines."
- Reporters may ask two or three questions at a time. Generally, it is not your responsibility to remember them all. Instead, listen carefully to the question and choose the one that you can answer with the best information.
- Make your point, reinforce it, then make your point again.
- Don't evaluate a question by saying, "That's a good question."
- Never repeat negatives that are asked. Use positive language.
- Ask for clarification, but don't repeat their question.
- Don't let false charges, facts, or figures stand uncorrected.
- Admit mistakes. Candor and the ability to admit mistakes will increase your credibility and help disarm opponents.
- Don't let reporters put words in your mouth. Some reporters will say, "In other words..." and use their words as your quote.
- Avoid qualitative comparisons with other individuals or organizations. They can sound self serving and smug.
- Have good eye contact with the interviewer. If you are being interviewed for TV, speak to the interviewer, not the camera.
- Don't swivel in your chair or play with an object. It's distracting.
- There is no such thing as "off the record." Assume that everything you say can get in print or broadcast. A more appropriate response to a question that you are unprepared or unwilling to answer is "It is not appropriate for me to answer that question;" or "I'd like to answer that question but I need to learn more about the situation before I can do that. When can I get back to you?"
- Ask the reporter a question or two near the end of the interview. You can often tell from his or her answers whether your remarks have been understood. You may want to find out about his/her publication and who else might be interviewed.

## Be Like Jesus When Dealing with the Media

*Once you identify stories that you'd like covered in the media and contacted them via a news release, they may just call you to do a story. You need to be prepared to deal with the media and serve as an expert on your topic or event.*

*If a reporter contacts you to do an interview or wants to come to your event, please respond to them quickly. If they leave a message, get back to them as soon as humanly possible.*

Things to do when talking to a reporter:

- Feel free to ask what the topic will be and the kinds of questions that will be asked. Don't walk into an interview blind.
- Give true and complete answers to questions asked. Don't conceal negative information, either.
- If you don't know an answer, say so. Guessing can get you in to trouble and will hurt your reputation with the media.
- Spell your name and provide your correct job title or affiliation with the church or event.
- Think like an average reader or listener. Don't assume everyone knows as much as you about the subject. Don't talk down to the audience but be clear and understandable in your speaking.
- Respect the reporter. Make your case without being overly zealous.
- If you are uncertain of something, ask questions. If a reporter's question is confusing to you, ask for clarification.
- Consider visual and audio elements to accompany a story. Make suggestions for possible photos and/or soundbites.



- Be warm and polite and professional.
- Tell the reporter to call back if they have additional questions or ambiguities after the interview.
- After the story has been printed or aired, call or write the reporter and thank him/her. Reporters, like most of us, appreciate feedback.

## What if Jesus had been interviewed by CNN?

*He would have asked Larry King about the parameters of the interview. He wouldn't have walked into it blind, although he may have brought a blind man to give sight during the interview. He would have been truthful- and answered Larry's questions completely (after all, God is all-knowing!) He probably would tell a parable here and there to prove his point. He would make sure that Larry knew exactly how to spell his name. You can bet he would speak in layman's terms and would have been respectful of his interviewer and his time. I can't imagine Jesus would be anything but polite and professional.*

*Following the interview, I'm sure Jesus would get in touch with Larry to thank him for telling the Good News to the large CNN audience. He may even ask Larry to go fishing with him sometime to gain a good working relationship with him. The two "Kings" would have caught a lot of fish, don't you think?*

### How do you know your story is going to accurate?

You don't. You should not assume that you will see the reporter's story before it is published or broadcast. The reporter is under no obligation to show the copy to you. Reporters and editors have the ultimate decision in what to print/air. If you are concerned about being misquoted, just say so, and ask the reporter's cooperation.

Get the reporter to understand and be engaged in your position. That way, he or she may be more sensitive. Also, don't ask to see a copy of the story before publication. Use short, direct words as much as possible. If you do, you are more likely to be quoted accurately.

Ask the reporter a question or two near the end of the interview. You can often tell from his or her answers whether your remarks have been understood.

### Television Tips

- Make sure your dress is appropriate. Avoid large jewelry, wear simple patterns and stay away from plain white.
- Sit or stand erect and somewhat forward. Some hand motion is appropriate.
- Use the reporter's name during the interview.
- Don't shout into the microphone.

## Gracefully Speaking During Interviews

*When a reporter contacts you to do an interview, there are some tips to help this experience go well for you. It is best to give interviews in person, so you can get a better feel for the reporter, making sure that notes are taken slowly and accurately on critical points. If a reporter reaches you by phone unannounced, find out what you need to know, decide whether to agree to the interview, and then call the reporter back at a convenient time, remembering that he or she has a deadline. If you are interviewed over the phone, stand up. You will sound better (especially for radio) and be more attentive. Invite a colleague to be present with you so that you are talking to someone rather than into the handset. Doing these things adds personality to your voice and message. Here are strategies to help your interview be successful:*

- Before the interview, be prepared and organized. Determine your main points. Write them out if they will help you organize your thoughts.
- Anticipate tough questions and think about how you can answer them truthfully and still put your spin on the answer.
- Be aware that "chitchat" before and after the formal interview is important in setting the tone and establishing rapport. It's also an important part of the interview and often will appear in the story.
- Think before you talk. It's okay to pause to collect your thoughts.
- Imagine a parent or spouse or friend is listening. The reporter is not your ultimate audience. If you are lulled into thinking the conversation is between the two of you, you may say something not everyone should hear.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and distinctly. Be calm and collected.

**How can you build bridges to bring a misguided interview back to your agenda?**

*Use some of these phrases:*

"I think what you are asking is..."

"Another way to look at this issue is..."

"If I understood your questions correctly..."

"Before I forget, I want to tell your audience (readers)..."

"Before we get off that subject, let me add..."

"That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is..."

*Stick to what you want to say. If the reporter doesn't ask a question you want, volunteer the information anyway but don't ramble.*