

Crozet United Methodist Church Contingency Communications Plan

Purpose: This document defines and specifies actions that will be taken to communicate internally and externally in response to unplanned major events at Crozet United Methodist Church (CUMC).

Overview: No matter what the event, successful communication requires CUMC to respond in a timely, effective, well-considered, and unified manner that honors GOD. No matter what the circumstances, CUMC and its leadership will respond in a sensitive way, appropriate to the severity of the event and strive to ensure that issues are not unnecessarily escalated in situations which appear to be a crisis, but in fact are not.

In all communications, CUMC strives to be accessible, prompt, compassionate, honest and informative. While such tenets may seem to be self-evident, it can be difficult to adhere to a clear style of communication during an unplanned major communications event. During an unplanned event, we must gather and understand the facts and implications of the situation as well as provide accurate and consistent information to all parties concerned. In responding to an unplanned major communications event, we must be informative, responsive and truthful. Since a major communications event may occur suddenly and without warning, this plan is designed to be flexible in order to accommodate contingencies of various types and magnitudes.

Recognizing a Major Communications Event

An unplanned major communications event is defined as an occurrence that requires public comment or statement from the church. Some events are benign however, frequently these events can endanger the church's reputation and/or financial position arising as the result of a legal, management/employment, advocacy, political, or public relations issue. Examples include:

- An issue that impacts one or more services at CUMC such as fire, storm damage, or power outage
- A church leader scandal or death
- An online hack or information leak
- A highly visible and/or viral campaign against CUMC
- Third party accusation of illegal or unethical accounting practices
- A crime on the grounds of CUMC
- A crime committed by a congregant, staff, or clergy
- A CUMC leader announcing candidacy in a government election
- Website or other communication methods go down for significant amount of time

Essential Action Items During a Major Communications Event

- **Pause and Pray:** Take a moment to ask for GOD's direction and discernment.

- **Inform Law Enforcement:** If there is any indication that illegal activity was conducted by any party, anyone acting under the scope of this plan must contact law enforcement immediately with the relevant details. If you are trying to decide whether or not to contact law enforcement, the answer is yes.
- **Inform the Staff:** At a minimum, the Senior Pastor must be informed of any occurrence that triggers the implementation of this plan. Depending on the event, the Senior Pastor will inform other staff members as appropriate. If the Senior Pastor is unavailable, the Emergency Communications Team will inform the appropriate staff members.
- **Assemble the Emergency Communications Team:** The Emergency Communications Team consists of the Senior Pastor, Lay Leader(s) (as defined under the Book of Discipline) and Communications Director. The Emergency Communications Team gathers the information, developing and disseminating key messages for both internal and external audiences.
- **Designate a Spokesperson:** As a rule, the Senior Pastor serves as the spokesperson for internal and external audiences. If the Senior Pastor is unavailable, the Lay Leader(s) and Communications Director will designate an interim spokesperson until the return of the Senior Pastor. To enable media access, distribute the workload, or speed communications, the Emergency Communications Team may share spokesperson duties. No one else at CUMC is authorized to speak for internal or external audiences.
- **Disable Access to the Facility:** If the event involves an individual with access to the building, all attempts should be made to immediately disable access. Access is a privilege extended by CUMC, not the right of an individual, and it can be restored at a later time.
- **Disable Access to Electronic Systems:** If the event involves an individual with access to internal or external church communications platforms and/or file management systems, such as CMS and email, all attempts should be made to immediately disable access. Access is a privilege extended by CUMC, not the right of an individual, and they can be restored at a later time.
- **Protect the Identity of Minors:** If an individual under the age of 18 (regardless of what role) is involved in a major communications event, CUMC will take all reasonable action to safeguard the identity of the child. CUMC leadership will involve the minor's parents and/or guardians as soon as possible.
- **Inform the District Superintendent:** The Senior Pastor will inform the District Superintendent of any event that triggers the implementation off this plan. If the Senior Pastor is unavailable, the Emergency Communications Team will ensure the District Superintendent is notified.

Development of Key Messages

The Emergency Communications Team will develop key messages for internal and external audiences to ensure CUMC speaks with a unified and clear message to minimize misinformation and rumor. As the event evolves and circumstances change these key messages will evolve. These key messages must be communicated as quickly as possible and regularly updated. In developing key messages, the Emergency Communications Team will:

- Rate the need to disseminate a public response:
 - Immediate.
 - Within the day.
 - Within two or more days.
 - Not immediate or evolving with the event.
- Identify the messages for internal and external audiences (they may or may not be the same):
 - The key message.
 - Supporting facts.
 - The communications channel to disseminate the message. This may be a press release, briefing, interview, or social media.

Communicating Key Messages:

- **Internal Audiences:** Ideally the Emergency Communications Team will inform CUMC leadership, staff, and members (in that order) of the crises in any appropriate manner before details are released externally.
- **External Audiences:** If needed, the Emergency Communications Team will supply key messages including verifiable details to the news media as rapidly as possible. The Emergency Communications Team will work to ensure key messages do not conflict with key messages provided by government authorities.

Dealing with the Press

CUMC leaders, staff, and volunteers should refer all press inquiries to the Senior Pastor or Communications Director. Relating to members of press successfully and constructively is crucial to the success of communications at CUMC.

Most members of the press do not want to run a factually incorrect story. Even when dealing with an aggressive journalist, it can be helpful to remember that they may treat the “other side of the story” just as aggressively in pursuit of an unbiased truth.

Journalists are usually interested in offering a different angle on the story that includes fresh information or better evidence than what they already have.

In fulfilling the role of a spokesperson:

DO	DON'T
<p>Prepare for your interviews. The journalist did.</p> <p>Anticipate questions before an interview.</p> <p>Make yourself accessible.</p> <p>Be friendly and professional.</p> <p>Keep answers short, informative and directly related to the question.</p> <p>Respect timelines communicated by members of the press. They will publish without you.</p> <p>Correct misinformation.</p> <p>Ask for clarification from the journalist about anything you don't understand.</p> <p>Think before you speak. It's ok to pause.</p> <p>Try to repeat the key messages and "where to learn more about this" three different times.</p>	<p>Don't say "no comment" or "I can't answer that."</p> <p>Don't speculate. Share what you know and commit to finding out what you don't know.</p> <p>Don't lose your cool.</p> <p>Don't use church jargon or "christianese."</p> <p>Don't try to stop a member of the press from running a story. Offer to help with the story.</p> <p>Don't say anything "off the record" or make bad jokes. Remain professional with the press.</p> <p>Don't say anything you wouldn't want to read in the story later.</p> <p>Don't get sidetracked out of the key issue. Bring it back to the core message if you need to.</p>

Leadership Roles: During a major communications event, leaders should refrain from public comment (including social media) on the event and direct inquiries to CUMC messaging, posts and the spokesperson. However, leaders can share or repost any communications from the Senior Pastor or Crozet UMC Spokesperson.

Evaluation and Follow-Up: Throughout a major communications event, the Communications Director will document the news coverage surrounding a event, including social media, wire stories, newspaper articles, radio, and television broadcasts. Following the event, the Communications Director will supply the Emergency Communications Team and CUMC Administrative Board a summary and assessment of our execution of this plan.