



DIOCESE of
FORT WAYNE - SOUTH BEND
SECRETARIAT for COMMUNICATIONS

Media Guidelines for Parishes

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Occasionally, situations will arise that draw media interest to your parish. In such instances, whether the coverage is celebratory or sensitive, please refer to these guidelines as a resource to help you navigate media interactions with the support of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Communications Team.

Media attention can also be an opportunity to share the good work of the Church and bear witness to our Catholic faith. The Communications Team is available not only to assist with difficult situations, but also to help parishes make the most of positive media opportunities.

When to contact the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Communications Team:

Parishes **must** contact the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Secretary for Communications **before** engaging with media on matters involving diocesan policy, controversy, legal issues, crises, or other potentially sensitive topics.

For routine or positive media opportunities, prior approval by the Secretary for Communications is generally not necessary. However, parishes are always welcome to reach out for assistance preparing for an interview, developing key messages, responding to questions, or coordinating media coverage.

Situations when you should contact the Communications Team include:

- When you are contacted by a journalist/reporter, or when you know that a staff member, parishioner, volunteer, etc., may be featured in relation to your parish/school in a media story—whether positive or negative.
- When a parishioner or other individual threatens to go to the media over a dispute.
- When your parish has an issue involving a parishioner, employee, volunteer, or other individual posting something inappropriate on social media, a website, or another public forum that has drawn attention beyond the parties involved.
- When a group of parishioners or others voice disagreement with the parish through public protests, letters, petitions, or other public actions.
- When an emergency or crime occurs at your parish, including fire, theft, violent crime, matters involving drugs or alcohol, or other situations involving law enforcement.
- When a tragic, public event occurs involving a parishioner or member of the parish community.

When you're not sure whether a situation merits a call to the Diocese, we invite you to make the call. It never hurts to check!

Interacting with Media:

- You are not required to give an interview, provide photographs, or immediately respond to a reporter's questions. In sensitive situations, contact the Communications Team before responding.
- If a reporter contacts you and you are not prepared to respond, ask for the reporter's name, media outlet, contact information, questions or topic, and deadline. Let the reporter know that someone will follow up.
- Do not speculate about a situation. Share only confirmed facts that are appropriate for public release.
- Remember that there is no such thing as "off the record" unless you and the reporter have explicitly agreed to those terms in advance. Assume anything you say to a reporter could be published or broadcast.
 - "Off the record" means the comment cannot be referenced in any way in the reporter's story. The reporter can only use your comment to confirm something.
 - "On background" means your comments may be used to inform a reporter's story, but the source remains anonymous.
- You are not required to allow media inside any building on parish property. Media representatives should seek permission before entering a parish building. Media representatives and media vehicles may remain on public property, such as streets and sidewalks, but they may not enter parish parking lots or other parish property without permission.
- Be polite and professional when dealing with members of the media, including when declining to comment. In difficult circumstances, you may ask for their cooperation and understanding.

Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend Communications Contacts:

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I welcome your phone call or email any time! Please do not hesitate to reach out.