

Media Communication/Engagement Policy and Guidelines

1. MEDIA COMMUNICATION/ENGAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the Synod) is committed to accurate and respectful media engagement and communication that is undertaken by the Synod and/or other councils and members of the Church.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Synod staff members, Presbyteries, Congregations, members, volunteers, and contractors involved with any of the councils of the Church within the bounds of the Synod.

3. OBJECTIVE

To ensure clarity regarding principles and processes used in communicating and engaging with media outlets.

4. DEFINITIONS

Definitions for the purposes of this policy are as follows:

- 'Media' means any external sources, be they radio, television, newspaper or internet based.
- 'Synod Ministries and Operations (SMO) staff' means all persons whether lay or ordained who are appointed to a particular role within Synod Ministries and Operations.
- 'Comms Team' means the Communications Team of Synod Ministries and Operations.
- 'Presbyteries' means all persons, whether lay or ordained, who have any position of responsibility within any Presbytery within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.
- 'Congregations' means all persons whether lay or ordained in leadership roles, including all members of Church Councils.
- 'Members, volunteers & contractors' means all people who are not employed directly by the Church, but are working for it in either a paid or unpaid capacity.
- 'Synod/VicTas Synod' means the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.
- 'Subject Matter Expert' means any member of staff or member of the Church recognised by the Moderator as having specialist knowledge or expertise in relation to a particular matter.

5. ONLY THE MODERATOR AND AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVES MAY SPEAK TO THE MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THE UNITING CHURCH SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

The Moderator has the responsibility of speaking on behalf of the Synod (Regulation 3.6.3.2(g)). In the light of this responsibility, the Moderator may authorise others (such as Synod staff, subject matter experts, etc) to speak on behalf of the Church to assist in communicating the Synod's policies, decisions, activities, and related matters.

It is also important to note that no-one from the Synod is authorised to speak on behalf of the Uniting Church regarding national matters without authorisation from the President of the UCA Assembly.

6. MEDIA COMMUNICATION/ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are provided to assist the Uniting Church VicTas Synod SMO staff, Congregations, Presbyteries, members, volunteers, and contractors to engage and communicate effectively with the media.

- (a) The Synod encourages positive interaction with the Synod Communications Team (Comms Team) who are happy to assist with any media enquiries SMO staff, Congregations and Presbyteries may encounter.
- (b) Congregations and Presbyteries are encouraged to engage with local media to promote positive engagement with the activities of the Congregation or Presbytery and to share 'good news' stories of the work of congregations and their members.
- (c) For media responding to events initiated by a council of the Church, the Comms Team can also assist in areas including:
 - i) Promotion of generally positive events and stories, such as Congregation events, milestones, or missional activities.
 - ii) Providing advice for more significant promotions if required.
 - ii) The provision of additional advice, guidelines, clarification, background or support.

Note: If a reporter diverts a line of questioning on to another topic, politely advise that you cannot comment on that topic but that you are happy to refer any questions on that matter to the Comms Team.

- (d) Whenever any party referred to in the Scope (see sect. 2 above) of this Policy and these Guidelines is contacted about a story that has broader community or Uniting Church policy implications, such as property transactions, they should:
 - i) Ask for the journalist's name, their media outlet/organisation and the journalist's contact details.
 - ii) Ask the journalist what information they are seeking and whether there is a deadline for any response to be made. Where possible, ask for this information to be provided via email.
 - iii) Not answer questions but respond by saying that someone will phone them back as soon as possible. Do not say 'No comment' just say someone will return their call as soon as possible.
 - iv) Contact the Comms Team through the Synod's Communications Manager **as soon as possible*** (see contact details below).

* Note: Journalists usually work to strict deadlines, and if they do not receive a response within their timeframe are likely to publish noting that they had 'approached the Uniting Church for comment but received no response' so the sooner the Comms Team is contacted, the better.

vi) The Moderator and/or those authorised by the Moderator may speak with the media on behalf of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. The Comms Team will make contact with the Moderator and/or an authorised subject matter expert, and assist in developing responses where appropriate to do so.

vii) SMO staff, Congregations, Presbyteries, members, volunteers, and contractors should always be mindful that any comment made to the media as a personal perspective may not necessarily be reported as such. They may be quoted as "...from the Uniting Church" suggesting that your comments represent the views of the wider Church. Therefore, it is best to politely decline to answer, either "on" or "off the record" and refer the journalist to the Comms Team.

7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Remember any comment made to a reporter has the potential to be published. The discussion of any matter with broader implications for the Church must be referred to the Comms Team, to assist in fulfilling the commitment to accurate and respectful media engagement and communication.

All those referred to in the Scope (see Sect. 2 above) of this Policy and these Guidelines should contact the Comms Team immediately if contacted by any media making enquiries about any Church matter.

8. SYNOD COMMUNICATIONS TEAM CONTACT DETAILS

Please feel free to contact Synod's Communications Team regarding any media enquiry or consideration regarding contacting the media:

- The Synod's Communications Manager:
Karin Kleynhans: Ph: 0419 343 869; Karin.kleynhans@victas.uca.org.au
and/or
- The Synod Communications Team in general: Communications@victas.uca.org.au
- The above contact details are also available on the Synod's website (www.victas.uca.com.au) under the "Contact Us" tab.

9. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY & GUIDELINES

This policy shall be reviewed at least every two years from the date of the Standing Committee's approval, with:

- the General Secretary initiating the review; and
- with a report on the review and any proposed revisions being presented to the Standing Committee.