

WORKING WITH THE LOCAL MEDIA

Why bother with the local media?

- You have a story to tell – the media is athirst for stories
- The local media can help you reach people who will never otherwise come into contact with your church
- Being 'in the news' helps build your profile and positions the church at the heart of the community
- It can give you credibility and is good for the morale of your congregation
- If you take the initiative, you have a chance to shape the story, rather than letting someone else set the agenda
- The media can be your allies in tough times
- News coverage is free – and it's not that difficult!

What makes a story?

- The new – 'New minister for St X church' or 'New club opens for older people' is 'news'. How important depends on your standpoint.
- The unusual/different: '50 people go to church on Sunday' is probably not news. '50 people go to church on Thursday' might be. So might 'Church goes to people at car boot sale'.
- The quirky – 'Church holds Harvest Festival in church' is dull compared with 'Church holds Harvest Festival in supermarket'
- The first/biggest/oldest/youngest - the media love statistics and milestones
- Genuinely local – if there isn't a local angle, it's probably not going to interest the local media. So 'churches all over Britain invite people back to church' is less interesting than 'St Mark's down-the-road invites people back to church..'
- Something visual – always try to think where the picture is for the story. The media are more likely to cover something visual.
- Case studies – if your new church hall can now offer excellent value wedding receptions right next to the church, do you have a couple who have already booked who will be happy to say why?
- People not things – look for the human interest. So 'church gets new gate' is not very interesting, 'local craftsman makes gate from ancient oak' more so.
- Something that fits in with other current issues – for example: If there is a national report on young people and ASBOs, the media might be interested that your church runs a club for teenagers excluded from school. If there's a report on women prisoners what about your MU help with a prison creche.

But remember: news value is relative. A minor story can make the media on a slow news day, but will be binned when a major story breaks. And sometimes, in spite of your best efforts, you will be disappointed.

So now what?

- Research your local media. Get to know what they cover.
- Plan in advance – what can you invite them to?
- Write a press release (see separate handout)
- Follow up with a phone call if appropriate.