

Communication

Since so many of the decisions and actions associated with restructuring are sensitive, good communication is necessary at every step in the restructuring process to avoid unnecessary stress on the community. Whenever possible, stakeholders and decision makers should be in communication, to assure that everyone is working with the best, most clear, and accurate information.

Quick Reference for Communication

Requirements	Routes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get process for obtaining approval from all pastors concerned when making announcements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated staff member does bulletins for all parishes/churches Joint communications/transition committee coordinates messages Bulletin editors confer/coordinate messages
Requests	Range
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the Director of Communications at the Archdiocese if you are unsure about speaking to the media or crafting sensitive messages Avoid giving different messages to different parishes/church sites Make sure all parishes/sites are aware of process for joint communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Minimal</u>: No joint communication or occasional bulletin insert for clusters/consolidations <u>Intermediate</u>: Collaboration gets a corner of bulletin/websites <u>Maximum</u>: Shared bulletin, website, etc...

It is generally advised that the Archdiocesan Director of Communication deals with the public media. Official information will be published in *The Catholic Spirit* and on the Archdiocesan website at www.archspm.org.

The pastor (in consultation with the TLCC and the parish pastoral council) is responsible for the release of information internally to parishioners and community members. He may seek out advice from the Archdiocesan representative and/or the Archdiocesan Communications Office prior to releasing critical information.

Committees and Councils should also be in contact with each other, with the parishioners, and between the parishes being merged or clustered.

A merger may not be decided until the affected parishioners have been informed about the proposal and given an opportunity to be heard. Possible ways to do this include a parish-wide mailing, bulletin announcements, open parish meetings, and ideally, a combination of these. All efforts to inform the parish community and the feedback received must be documented and preserved in the parish archives. Not only will the work of open and honest communication with parishioners help avoid the possibility of an appeal being lodged against a merger, but in case of an appeal the documentation will be necessary to demonstrate that parishioners were appropriately informed and their concerns addressed.

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Early in the process **members of APP can help the pastors with communication** to the parishioners, through, for example, a parish assembly or other such forum to inform them of the various details in the merging or clustering of a parish.

Media Relations Tips

If you are contacted by a member of the media asking questions about the Archdiocese or the Strategic Plan in general, please do not attempt to answer their questions. Instead, please refer the media member to the Archdiocesan Director of Communications, and give the director a call to help them prepare for the expected call.

If you are contacted by a member of the media asking questions about your particular location, please do the following:

Find out who you are talking to and why the person is calling and ask:

- What is your name?
- Why are you calling?
- What media outlet are you with?
- What is the focus of your story?
- What specific information are you seeking?
- What is your deadline?

Preparing for the Interview (Over the Phone or in Person):

If you do agree to an interview, here are some tips:

- Ensure you have enough time to prepare for the interview. Don't do an interview if you are not ready.
- Know your subject and essential facts.
- Make sure you have three key messages you want to include in your answers: actually write them out, but don't have them in front of you.
- Think of the question you most want asked and the question you least want asked: be prepared to answer both (even if the answer is "I don't know").
- Going "on camera" is a difficult decision to make and should be weighed carefully. If you do go on camera for an interview, remember that the average sound bite that gets used on TV is only seven seconds.

Conducting the Interview

During the interview, follow these guidelines:

- Be cordial, but think before you answer.
- Be as succinct and clear as possible. Do not be condescending, understanding that most journalists are general assignment and do not have specialized knowledge of the Catholic Church.
- Everything you say can be used. Nothing is "off the record."

- Do not say “no comment.”
- If you don’t know an answer, just say so or offer to get back to the reporter if that is feasible: don’t be shy about saying “that will take some time to determine.”
- *Never* speculate.
- Do not repeat negative words or speculation included in questions asked by the interviewer. For example: if you are asked "Isn't this going to be terrible news to your fellow parishioners?" don't say: "No, I don't think it's going to be terrible news." Just say "No, not at all." (Or something similar.)
- A bit of humor is fine, but be careful about using it, because it can be quoted out of context.
- At the end of the interview, if you think the reporter may have misunderstood something, politely say what you think and make sure he/she does understand.

Media Shooting Live at Your Site or for Live Interview

When the media is on site and shooting live, remember the following:

- Remember that a live interview is live, so there is no chance for “do-overs” and your interview is also recorded and may be used again in a different context.
- If a TV crew wishes to set up a live shot in a valid parking area on a public street (or shoot video or conduct interviews with passersby from their position on any other public property) that is their right.
- If a TV crew wishes to set up for a live shot on parish/school property, it is your decision whether to allow this. However you should very carefully weigh this decision because of intrusiveness to parishioners, the potential for liability issues, and other concerns if you allow them to set up on parish/school property.
- Ask TV crews to please give those entering or leaving a church/school building some space. For example, you may request that a live crew set up outside a door away from the main parking lot and then let parishioners know if they don’t want to talk to the media, don’t go out door X.