



Diocese of St. Augustine Communications Policy Regarding Media and Unexpected Events

Effective Date: April 14, 2008/

Updated: May 10, 2016

Scope: This policy affects all parishes, schools and entities of the Diocese of St. Augustine and is proffered through the Office of Communications for the appropriate management of information distributed to the members of the diocese and affiliations, as well as the public through the secular media.

Definitions:

“Diocesan Personnel” includes: clergy, religious brothers and sisters, lay staff for diocesan ministries, parishes, schools and volunteers.

“Diocesan Entity” includes: parishes, schools, Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc., Marywood Retreat Center, Guardian Catholic Schools, Mission Nombre de Dios and Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche and other entities recognized through the Diocese of St. Augustine annual Diocesan Directory.

Policy:

The Office of Communications is the primary source of information for the Diocese of St. Augustine about diocesan events, news and announcements – both internally and externally. It is important to present the diocese, representing the teachings of the Catholic Church, both accurately, and in the best possible light. When information is released, every effort must be made to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation or confusion. Once a misconception takes root, it is always difficult and often impossible to make a full correction.

In the interest of orderly, consistent management of information released to the news media and the general community, the following policy and procedures are established for all parishes, schools and entities of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

An Unexpected or Significant Event or Grave Situation

When an unexpected or significant event or grave situation occurs at a diocesan entity, it is important to communicate the unexpected or significant event or grave situation to the appropriate authority(s) at the diocesan entity, as well as the appropriate authority at the Catholic Center immediately. These may include, but are not limited to natural disasters, accidents with injury, medical personnel required at the diocesan entity, law enforcement or fire department notification and response at the diocesan entity, a death, and serious misconduct by a student, faculty, staff, school lockdowns, etc. The appropriate person(s) at the Catholic Center would be the Vicar General, Chancellor, Director of Communications, Director of Human Resources, Insurance Representative and other department heads as appropriate, depending upon the unexpected or significant event or grave situation, such as the Chief Financial Officer or the Superintendent of Catholic Schools. The bishop will be informed by the Vicar General or Chancellor.

Working with Secular Media

1. Diocesan personnel are to report all media calls to the Office of Communications immediately before answering any questions from the reporter. Provide the reporter's name, media outlet and telephone number, inquire about the reporter's deadline, the subject of the story and tell him/her that a representative of the Office of Communications will return the call promptly. Or, you can advise the reporter to call the Office of Communications directly. In order for the Office of Communications to return media calls and meet their deadlines, it is imperative that the notice to the Office of Communications is made immediately. It is critical that all media calls be addressed on the same day they are received, if at all possible. It is also helpful if basic information is provided to the Office of Communications so they can appropriately respond to the media inquiry.
2. Diocesan personnel will not respond to inquiries from the news media concerning matters such as personnel issues, crisis/emergency situations, insurance, diocesan policies and fiscal operations; instead, they must immediately refer such inquiries to their immediate supervisor and the Director of the Office of Communications.
3. Diocesan personnel – will not contact reporters or news outlets to initiate or suggest a story without consulting the Director of Communications first.
4. Diocesan personnel will contact their supervisor and the Director of Communications regarding “breaking news.” A strategy will be prepared and an official spokesperson will be designated. The bishop's office will participate in this strategic planning, as well as the diocesan attorney, if appropriate.
5. All diocesan entities are private property. The secular media (print or broadcast) is not allowed on diocesan property without the express permission from the head of the entity in coordination with the Director of Communications.
6. Diocesan personnel will not host, produce or purchase time to air radio and television programs or agree to a guest appearance without prior consultation with the Director of

Communications. This does not apply to time purchased to promote a parish or school event such as a carnival, bazaar or other fundraising event.

Please contact the Office of Communications with questions concerning this policy. When in doubt, ask!

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Procedure:

General Media Coverage

1. Before granting an interview for topics that involve diocesan personnel, parish or entity events, celebrations, workshops, openings or dedications, diocesan personnel are asked to call the Director of Communications for a mini-briefing. The director will be glad to share information about the reporter, the angle the story is likely to take, other stories the reporter may be researching or writing at the time, and any other background information that may be helpful for the interview. While media representatives often work under tight deadlines, they sometimes will fax or email questions in advance and a few may be willing to read direct quotes back to a source. Be sure to ask when the story will be published or broadcast. Call your supervisor and the Director of Communications after the interview has been completed to debrief/report on the interview.
2. All requests for in-person and on-camera media interviews (interviews not conducted by phone) will be coordinated through the Office of Communications. If cleared through the Office of Communications and coordinated with the pastor, school principal or diocesan entity, diocesan personnel who are in the field or at a public meeting may give in-person and on-camera interviews if they are directly involved with the subject matter and/or it is their area of expertise. Contact your supervisor and the Office of Communications afterwards and provide details of the interview and when the story will broadcast or published.
3. All news releases are disseminated by the Office of Communications on diocesan letterhead via fax or email. A "News Release" is a news story/announcement written for and released to the news media including publications, radio and television/cable television media outlets, electronic media sites, etc. The release is a pitch to the media and they may or may not use the information. It is their call.
4. Information provided to the *St. Augustine Catholic* for coverage, either through the "Around the Diocese" column, calendar of events, feature story or to the diocesan website (www.dosaf1.com), should be submitted through the "News Release Request Form." The

purpose of this form is to provide the Office of Communications with the basic information about the event/program/service to include in the appropriate media. Duplicate the form as needed. Submit the completed form to the Office of Communications five to six (5-6) weeks prior to an event or program for secular media. Refer to the production schedule for the magazine for additional publication deadlines.

5. Diocesan entities, with permission from the appropriate supervisor, may submit local calendar-type items directly to news outlets without prior notification to the Office of Communications. Consultation services are available for diocesan entities seeking publicity for programs, events and services.
6. The Director of Communications will coordinate all media briefings, news conferences and background sessions for reporters.
7. Diocesan personnel who are in a position to be interviewed by the media shall attend media relations/spokesperson training, which is offered periodically by the Office of Communications. Spokespersons are selected by the head of the diocesan entity for the purpose of this training.
8. All “Letters-to-the-Editor” and correspondence with news media must be approved and issued by the Office of Communications to avoid misquotes or errors in the information published. If you are misquoted or if there is a serious error, contact the Office of Communications as quickly as possible. Do not contact the media outlet without first discussing the matter with the Director of Communications.
9. Editorial board meetings for the purpose of soliciting editorial support shall be coordinated by the Director of Communications. The director will coordinate the participation of personnel for these meetings. Diocesan personnel who are contacted by editorial page writers and/or editors must refer the call to the Office of Communications.
10. Diocesan entities should consult with the Director of Communications on the content, design and placement of public service announcements, newsletters, brochures, paid advertising, etc. If advertising contracts are involved consult with the Director of Communications before entering into any agreement with local media outlets. This is particularly important when considering the publication in which you may place advertising or public service announcements. Some publications and stations carry a negative connotation and may oppose church teachings.

Exceptions:

Parishes and schools may submit ads directly to media outlets, without prior approval, if the purpose of the ad is to advertise an event, program or liturgical services.

Crisis Communications

The Office of Communications must be notified of a crisis or any potential crisis immediately. The director will contact appropriate diocesan leadership for a response. (Refer to the wallet-size

card entitled: *Diocese of St. Augustine Emergency Response Procedures*). For a copy of this card, please contact the Diocesan Human Resources Office.

A crisis is defined as any emergency or controversy that could significantly impact the public perception or reputation of the diocese. Emergencies include, but are not limited to, fires, accidents, explosions, tornadoes and other weather-related incidents and natural disasters. Controversies include: crimes or threats against diocesan personnel, suicides, inappropriate conduct by faculty, staff or students; fiscal irregularities and personnel issues.

Example of Information Management of an Unexpected Event

1. 8:00 a.m. Unexpected event occurs at diocesan entity
2. 8:15 a.m. Staff person learns of unexpected event
3. 8:16 a.m. Staff person notifies head of diocesan entity
4. 8:30 a.m. Head of diocesan entity notifies the Vicar General or Chancellor at the Catholic Center; Director of Communications; and other appropriate diocesan personnel (such as Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Fiscal Officer and Insurance Representative); and diocesan attorney. (Refer to the wallet-size card entitled: *Diocese of St. Augustine Emergency Response Procedures*).
5. 8:30 a.m. Simultaneous with diocesan notification, action is taken by diocesan entity to address the unexpected event.
6. 8:30 a.m. and beyond Diocesan personnel work with diocesan entity for information management, both internal and external, as well as strategic plan to deal with situation.
 - a) Office of Communications manages media inquiries through the entity, as well as directly from its office.
 - b) Office of Communications, in coordination with other diocesan personnel, work to prepare internal and external statements to be distributed to parishioners, parents, etc. or news media as appropriate.
 - c) Spokesperson(s) is designated and trained for internal and external oral statements in coordination with the Office of Communications.

Secular Media and Funerals

The media's coverage of tragic deaths and funerals is a continual challenge for us as a Catholic community, particularly as we try to minister to grieving families and the needs of others who are closely touched by the tragedy.

As a diocese, we try to cooperate with the media whenever possible. In the case of funeral services, however, mourners and family members should be allowed respect and privacy. Often, coverage of these types of stories continues as more information is uncovered regarding such tragedies.

When such a circumstance occurs, please consider the following suggestions:

1. Call the Director of Communications to discuss such a media request.
2. Advise the family of the request and how they would like us to respond.
3. Welcome media representatives to attend the funeral service without cameras, as a supportive member of the community.
4. Advise the media (if appropriate) that they will not be allowed on church property out of respect for the privacy of the family at this time.
5. Advise the media (if appropriate) that they will not be allowed to interview family members and/or friends on property.
6. Provide the media with the funeral service program (if available), and copies of the celebrant's homily and any eulogies, which might be given.

The Director of Communications can also work with the media and send appropriate notices communicating the wishes of the family as a courtesy to the diocesan entity. We all endeavor to make the experience as harmonious as possible under the circumstances for all concerned.

Illness of Priests

Please follow this procedure should a priest fall ill or have a scheduled surgery (inpatient or outpatient).

1. Parishes or appropriate individuals should notify the Chancellor or Vicar for Priests or Vicar for Senior Priests if a priest is seriously ill, having a scheduled surgery or in danger of death.
2. The Chancellor will notify the Bishop.
3. The Chancellor or Vicar for Priests or Vicar for Senior Priests will notify the appropriate priest or hospital chaplain to assure the priest's sacramental needs are met.

4. The Chancellor will notify other priests to ask for solidarity through prayer, always respecting the privacy of the priest.
5. The Chancellor will notify the Director of Communications and other diocesan offices as appropriate in the situation of an illness of a priest.
6. Priests are encouraged to have a will outlining their wishes for funeral arrangements, burial, etc. Provide a copy of this will to the Chancellor for a record on file.

Death of Priests

When an incardinated priest of the Diocese of St. Augustine dies, the following procedures should be followed:

1. At the death of a priest, parishes or other notifying entities are asked to contact the Chancellor's Office regarding the death of a priest. Provide the Chancellor with as much detail as possible (name of priest, name of parish, date of death, next of kin, etc.). If you receive voice mail, please try the cell phone of the Chancellor. At this date, Deacon David William's cell phone number is (904) 625-0025.
2. The Chancellor will immediately notify the Bishop and other appropriate diocesan entities.
3. Unless his schedule absolutely prevents his attendance, the Bishop will be the main celebrant of funerals for priests serving in the diocese if the funeral is taking place in the diocese (unless other written instructions are provided).
4. The Chancellor will notify all other priests of the death along with the details of the vigil and/or funeral. Priests are encouraged to concelebrate the Funeral Mass, as a sign of unity of the priesthood and Presbyterate.
5. The Chancellor will obtain a copy of the will from the Fiscal Officer.
6. The Chancellor will notify the Catholic Center staff regarding the death.
7. The Chancellor will notify the Office of Communications with details for distribution to the *St. Augustine Catholic* magazine, *Pastoral Briefings*, *The Florida Catholic* newspaper and secular media as appropriate.
8. The Bishop's Office will prepare Mass cards for the Funeral Mass.
9. The policy on "Funerals of Priests & Deacons" in the *Chancery Policy Book* should be consulted for specific responsibilities.

For priests' incardinated in other dioceses or religious order priests residing or serving in the Diocese of St. Augustine, the following procedures will be followed:

1. At the death of a priest, parishes or other notifying entities are asked to contact the Chancellor regarding the death of a priest. Provide the Chancellor with as much detail as possible (name of priest, name of parish, date of death, next of kin, etc.) If you receive voice mail, please try the cell phone of the Chancellor. At this date, Deacon David William's cell phone number is (904) 625-0025.
2. The Chancellor will immediately notify the Bishop, and the appropriate diocese or provincial as necessary.
3. The Funeral Mass will be coordinated per the express written instructions of the priest or as dictated by the appropriate diocese, religious order, etc.
4. The Chancellor will notify all other priests of the death along with the details of the vigil and/or funeral. If the funeral Mass is held in the Diocese of St. Augustine, priests are encouraged to concelebrate as a sign of unity of the priesthood and Presbyterate.
5. The Chancellor will notify the Catholic Center staff regarding the death.
6. The Chancellor will notify the Office of Communications with details for distribution to the *St. Augustine Catholic* magazine, *Pastoral Briefings*, and other media as appropriate.
7. The Bishop's Office will prepare Mass cards for the Funeral Mass if the Mass is conducted in the Diocese of St. Augustine.
8. The policy on "Funerals of Priests & Deacons" in the *Chancery Policy Book* should be consulted for specific responsibilities.