

Introduction

The Presbytery of the Cascades consists of people and systems - elected staff, support staff, congregations, minister members and the wider Presbyterian community. This crisis communication plan will facilitate the work and mission of the Presbytery of the Cascades and its members during an unexpected event that requires immediate action or response. Effectively Implementing this plan allows the Presbytery to clearly communicate with the members and churches of the Presbytery, other PC(USA) bodies, and the public.

The intent of this plan is to neither compromise nor detract from the mission of the Presbytery but rather to support the integrity of our ministry. Implementation of this plan is to be accomplished in ways which demonstrate grace, fairness, concern and pastoral care for all involved.

This plan is designed to assist the Presbytery staff in a crisis situation involving some aspect of the Presbytery, e.g., the Presbytery staff, the community or the greater church. The Presbytery also stands ready to assist congregations and ministry partners when a crisis arises within their settings. In doing so, the Presbytery will apply the principles in this plan.

Goals

- The Presbytery will reach out in a coordinated manner to those impacted by a crisis and respond to or through the media with promptness, accuracy and on a continuing basis, as needed.
- Throughout a crisis the Presbytery will seek to maintain the integrity of the church and the effectiveness of the Presbytery's ministry.
- The Presbytery will strive to use any crisis situation as an opportunity to witness as the church and will seek to minimize negative publicity.
- The Presbytery will manage the flow of information with openness, truthfulness, accessibility, and responsiveness.

Examples of Possible Situations

The following categories and examples are an attempt to anticipate the kinds of crises that are possible and *are not intended to be an exhaustive or prescriptive list*. They are offered to reduce the element of surprise and to assist in developing appropriate responses.

- Natural disasters
 - Flood, tornado, fire, blizzard, windstorm, and earthquake.
- Human caused disasters
 - Epidemic, wildfire or fire by arson, burglary of the Presbytery of the Cascades office.
- Terrorist acts, demonstrations, violent deaths, or injuries
 - Bomb threat, explosion, hostage situation, threat against staff, acts of war, demonstration against the Presbytery of the Cascades action, staff or member injured or killed.
- Personnel issues
 - Staff, member, volunteer, church and/or vendor charged with a crime, sexual harassment, or misconduct; lawsuit or wrongful termination action brought against the Presbytery of the Cascades or a member church.
 - Situations involving ministers which demand further follow-up beyond the Commission on Ministry (COM), minister charged with crime, or death of a minister member.
- Financial crises
 - Embezzlement by staff member or volunteer at Presbytery or church, failure of bank that holds Presbytery funds, sharp drop in the Presbytery of the Cascades income, Presbytery receives a pledge for a large bequest, however the donor is not able to donate the funds.

- Social Issue Response requested or desired
 - Comments/objections received to a proposed action such as addressing the housing crisis, hunger crisis, or establishing a rest area for cyclists on a trail.
- Denominational action response
 - PC(USA) policies protested at the local level in a way that invites a response

Crisis Team

The crisis team will consist of:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Presbyter • Advocate for Congregations and Clergy • Stated Clerk • Communications Manager • Missional Resource Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair, Communications and Technology Team • Presbytery Moderator • Presbytery Moderator-Elect • Chair of Presbytery Leadership Commission • Administrative Manager |
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Any member of the crisis team may convene the team. The quorum for a team meeting will be three of the above listed people. Everyone on the team shall be invited; some members may be dismissed if their services are not needed. The member convening the first meeting may invite others to attend and contribute relevant information. Other members may also suggest additional resources. (For example: Chair of Commission on Ministry, Chair of the Committee on Preparation of Ministry, regional vice-moderator, or additional legal counsel).

The contact information for persons currently holding these offices is in the *PLC Directory* found at <https://cascadespresbytery.org/directories/>

Crisis Team Duties

When the Presbytery faces a crisis, the following strategy will be employed as needed at the direction of the crisis team, to implement a coordinated response:

- The crisis team will convene as soon as practical, ideally within 24-48 hours upon learning of a situation that fits the examples above, or in anticipation of such a situation or event.
- The crisis team will gather facts about the crisis and immediately analyze the situation, drawing upon all necessary resources to complete the analysis. The situation analysis includes, but is not limited to, the scope of the situation, any legal implications, the public’s perception and other related events (past and future).
- Within an appropriate timeline for the situation, the crisis team will identify pastoral needs and develop the key message(s) to be conveyed during the crisis. The key messages allow the Presbytery to present its viewpoint on the information that is released.
- The crisis team will assign individuals to carry out specific duties, as necessary. Duties might include, but are not limited to: pastoral concerns, gathering information, notifying families and others involved, dealing with emergency officials, communicating with all staff and affected volunteers, and notifying the insurance company. The Administrative Manager will generally be assigned to serve as recordkeeper for the team.
- The crisis team may appoint:
 - **A Crisis Coordinator**
 - Ordinarily the Executive Presbyter (or Interim Executive Presbyter) or Advocate for Congregations and Clergy or Stated Clerk will serve as crisis coordinator. Alternatively, one of the other members of the crisis team may be selected to fill this role if circumstances make another selection more prudent.
 - **A Spokesperson**
 - Ordinarily, the Executive Presbyter is the spokesperson for the Presbytery. If the Executive Presbyter is not available, then another member of the Crisis Team will be selected as the spokesperson. Ordinarily, this will be the Advocate for Congregations and Clergy or the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM CHECKLIST

Presbytery of the Cascades *September 2023*

The tasks listed below are intended to be used in concurrence with the current POTC Crisis Communication Policy. This is not a linear process; after the team is convened to address a situation, steps may be repeated as the situation or events evolve. Unless otherwise stated, the entire team carries the responsibility for making sure all steps are covered as they work in a collaborative process. The Administrative Manager is the record keeper.

- 1. **Convener sends email to team to convene (ideally within 24-48 hours upon learning of situation)**
 - Members are listed in the policy; email addresses are in the PLC directory on the website.
 - Convener may be any member of the team. All team members are invited; convener may invite others to attend and contribute relevant information. Quorum is three members.
- 2. **Define presenting issue**
 - Identify any possible underlying or related issue(s)
- 3. **Identify pastoral needs.**
- 4. **Identify additional people/resources** necessary or if any team members may be excused.
- 5. **Gather or present** all relevant or updated information.
- 6. **Analyze situation**
 - Scope of discussion/situation
 - Legal implications
 - Public perception
 - Other related events (past/future)
 - Other related analysis
- 7. **Appoint** appropriate personnel and clarify duties:
 - Crisis Coordinator
 - Spokesperson
 - Media coordinator
- 8. **Communication**
 - Develop key message content and appropriate timeline
 - Determine means and frequency of communication
 - Identify appropriate internal and external audiences
 - Review media guidelines and resources if necessary (media coordinator)
 - Draft official statement, method, timing, and audience(s)
 - Clarify individual responsibilities for communications
- 9. **Assign** follow-up tasks
 - Schedule follow-up meeting if necessary
- 10. **Implement** strategy
 - Call follow-up meeting(s) as necessary
- 11. **Convene** team for post-crisis evaluation
 - Any member, ordinarily convener or crisis coordinator