

You and the media

Tips for members of General Synod 2010

The Synod is gathering under the theme of “Feeling the Winds of God: Charting a New Course”. Substantial amounts of time are allocated for reports on work mandated by the General Synod of 2007 including on-going deliberations over issues of human sexuality, VISION 2019, and a review of the primacy. We will celebrate the wrap-up of the 50th Anniversary of the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) and a great diocesan service commemorating the 300th Anniversary of the beginning of worship in the Anglican Tradition in Nova Scotia will be celebrated. The Synod will also consider a significant number of resolutions generated by its many Standing Committees. All of these matters are potentially of interest to news media.

This has implications for you as General Synod members. Reporters will be around. Reporters get in the way. Reporters may want to talk to you and may ask you questions that you are ill-prepared to answer. They may ask you questions that you don’t *want* to answer.

Reporters have a job to do and most try to do their job as competently and as unobtrusively as possible. Most, but not all. Some reporters come to an event like General Synod having done their homework and with an idea of who the people are and what is going on. Some, but not all. All reporters work under deadline. That means that when they want something, they want it *now*. Most reporters are courteous enough not to interrupt proceedings and approach people who are otherwise occupied. Most, but not all.

In case you find yourself interacting in some way with a journalist, and since some members have little experience dealing with the media, we thought we would provide you with some pointers.

The first thing you should know is that help is available. General Synod Communications (members of General Synod staff who have experience dealing with the news media) have put together a team of people whose principal duties at General Synod will be to handle the media. There will be a newsroom, to which arriving reporters will be directed. Your first option, if approached by the press, could be to direct the reporter(s) to General Synod’s media relations professionals.

These people are:

- **Paul Feheley Communications Coordinator for General Synod 2010**
- **Josie De Lucia, assistant to the coordinator and newsroom manager**
- **Trina Gallop, Director of Communications and Stewardship, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

If you are approached by reporters, here are some things for you to keep in mind:

- ***You have the right to remain silent. Nothing compels you speak with a reporter. You have the right to (politely) decline to be interviewed or to answer questions.***
- If you chose to talk to a reporter, remember (and tell them) that you are speaking as an individual. Very few people are authorized to speak for the church.
- Your views are yours alone. Those who blog need to be especially sensitive to this and always remember that they only reporting for themselves.

- Offer to write down your name and title for reporters. (It's the only way you can be sure they will get it right.)
- Answer the questions that are asked as directly and as concisely as possible. Reporters will love you for this. Ramble and you will see their eyes glaze over.
- Remember that "I don't know" or "I don't care to answer that" is a perfectly acceptable answer.
- If you are interviewed by radio or television, remember that you are not responsible for filling in silences. It's an old trick that reporters use: at the end of an answer, just keep staring at the subject and he/she will succumb to the temptation to please by volunteering more and more ... **Don't**.
- If you don't like the way an interview is going, you have the right to end it.
- **DO NOT** give a reporter a long interview and announce afterwards that it is off the record. If you say you are off the record after the fact, reporters will not honor that.
- Don't violate confidences. Table Group or private conversations are private.
- Remember that all of your interview will likely not be used. Reporters will be looking for highlights of what you said. They may not provide context or they may provide a little bit of context. They may provide the wrong context. Don't be inflammatory.
- Speak for yourself. (1) **Don't** let a reporter put words in your mouth. Be especially careful of a question that starts with something like "So what you are saying..." If you agree to that, you may find yourself quoted as having said a lot more than "yes."
- Speak for yourself. (2) Don't quote other people for attribution. "Well, my Bishop has told us that..." is asking for big trouble.
- Speak for yourself. (3) If you are asked about controversial topics, you will be most effective if you state your views in a positive way rather than speak negatively about the views of others. Don't worry about refuting "them." Let "them" speak for themselves.
- Remember you don't get to vet the content of an interview is over. Asking to see or hear material in which you are quoted before it is used will get you nowhere.
- Most reporters are nice people. But they have nothing invested in the story or in you as an individual. They are out to have you say things that are interesting, enlightening, controversial, or downright outrageous. You play into their hands at your peril.

Being interviewed can be fun. It is flattering to be asked for your views. So relax, and have fun, but be careful. And if you get into trouble, remember that help is available.

Archdeacon A Paul Feheley
Communications Coordinator for General Synod 2010



