

Guidelines for working with the media re: 10-A

Develop and nurture a relationship with local media:

- Encourage congregations to identify and make early contact with local media. “Pitch” stories to the media that present the positive aspects of the ministry and mission of the church at all levels.
- Initiate contact with the media to offer to talk about passage of 10-A before the story breaks (most likely around mid-May).

Know the facts of the issue:

- Develop two fact sheets (or FAQs):
 1. One that explains in general terms what the passage of 10-A means and doesn't mean – what it does and doesn't do. [The Office of the General Assembly (OGA) has developed a FAQ that could be incorporated into a fact sheet that takes into consideration the local context.]
 2. One for polity devotees that explains in more detail what 10-A likely means and doesn't mean.

Plan ahead:

- Develop and have ready a press release for local media to send as soon as possible after news about the outcome of 10-A. (OGA is working on a national press release, but having a local version with quotes from local leadership is a good idea, since local media tend to want to make a connection from the national to the local level.)
- Select ONE spokesperson for the organization (congregation, presbytery, synod, etc.) and let the leadership in the organization know who that person is so that the media will be referred to that individual.
- Before speaking with the media, write out what it is you want them to know – generally, three main points. [This will take some work, especially with secular media, to avoid using theological or PC(USA) jargon.]

When contacted by the media:

- Do not engage a reporter in conversation until you are prepared to talk. It is perfectly okay to tell a reporter you don't have time to talk at the moment. However, reporters have deadlines. Ask them about their deadline and schedule a time accordingly to talk with them.
- Stay in control of the conversation: Stick to your script to avoid the likelihood of being led by the reporter.
- Speak simply but not simplistically, and keep your answers short.
- Consider EVERYTHING “on the record,” even if the reporter is an acquaintance.
- Reporters are seldom “out to get you.” Like you, they do not want to make mistakes. However, make sure you understand their mission.
- Do NOT say “No comment,” which can look like you have something to hide.
- Do not attempt to answer a question if you really don't know the answer. Refer the reporter to the Stated Clerk or say you'll get back to him or her (and do). Stick to General Assembly actions.

- Reporters do not write headlines and probably won't accept any that you offer. However, a suggestion of possible headlines can plant a framework in the reporter's mind. You could say, "I've made up some headlines in my head, such as:
 - a. Presbyterians Reaffirm Local Authority Regarding Ordination
 - b. Presbyterian Church Opens Door to Ordination of Homosexuals
 - c. Presbyterian Church Offers Option on Ordination of Homosexuals

Finally...

- The story will *not* turn out exactly how you would have written it. If the article contains significant errors of fact, contact the reporter or consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece to clarify the issues.
- Continue to nurture the relationship with local media, which benefits both the media personnel and the stories and information you want to share with the community now and in the future.