



FREE GUIDE · COMMUNICATION

Church Crisis Communications Checklist

A crisis communications plan for churches with preparation checklists, template statements and recovery guidance.

We try hard to get everything here right, and every guide and template shows when it was last reviewed. But they are free, they are general and things change: the law, prices and the tools themselves. We cannot guarantee they are complete, current or right for your church, so check anything you rely on and take professional advice where a decision matters.

Church Crisis Communications Checklist

Who this is for: the minister or communications lead who has to speak for the church when something goes wrong, and wants a plan in place before it happens.

This checklist's first action, before anything goes wrong, is agreeing who leads your church's crisis response and who deputises if they are unavailable – then working through a contact tree, agreed channels and template holding statements for when something does happen.

No one wants to think about a crisis happening at their church. But when it does – and at some point, something will – the churches that cope best are the ones who thought about it in advance. This checklist will help you prepare, respond and recover.

Why Churches Need This

Crises come in many forms. Some are serious and some are manageable, but all of them need clear communication:

- Safeguarding incidents or allegations
- A minister's unexpected departure or suspension
- Building emergencies (fire, flood, structural damage)
- Controversial media coverage
- Social media crises (a post goes wrong, an argument escalates publicly)
- Financial difficulties or fraud
- Vandalism or theft
- A sudden bereavement within the congregation

The common thread is this: people are anxious, information is incomplete and what you say (or don't say) in the first few hours shapes everything that follows.

Before a Crisis Happens: Preparation

Don't wait until you're in the middle of a crisis to work out who does what. Spend an hour at a church council or leadership team meeting going through this section.

Identify your crisis communications lead

- ☐ Appoint one person as the crisis communications lead (usually the minister or a senior church officer)
- ☐ Appoint a deputy in case the lead is unavailable or is personally involved in the crisis

- ☐ Make sure both people have each other's mobile numbers and personal email addresses

Create a contact tree

Who needs to be told first? Write this down and keep it somewhere accessible (not just on someone's phone):

- ☐ Safeguarding officer
- ☐ Church officers (churchwardens, stewards, elders, deacons - depending on your tradition)
- ☐ Denominational contact (diocese, district, circuit or area office)
- ☐ Insurance company (have the policy number to hand)
- ☐ Key volunteers (those who manage social media, the building or children's work)

Agree communication channels

Not everything should go on social media. Agree in advance which channels are appropriate for different situations:

Channel	Use for	Don't use for
Phone / in person	Safeguarding concerns, sensitive pastoral matters, informing key people first	General updates
Email	Briefing the congregation, factual updates	Anything time-critical (people don't check email constantly)
Social media	Public-facing statements, practical info (e.g. "church is closed today")	Safeguarding details, speculation, anything unconfirmed
Website	Official statements, updated information	First communication (too slow)

Draft template holding statements

Have these ready to adapt. It's much harder to write a calm, clear statement when you're in the middle of a crisis. See the templates section below.

Know your denominational contacts

- ☐ Denominational communications team (diocese, district, circuit or area): name, phone, email
- ☐ Denominational press office: phone number
- ☐ Denominational safeguarding team: phone number
- ☐ Your regional denominational leader (archdeacon, chair of district, moderator or equivalent)

Media

- ☐ Agree one named person who speaks to journalists (and only that person)

- ☐ Everyone else's response to media enquiries: "Thank you for contacting us. Please direct all media enquiries to [named person] on [phone/email]."
 - ☐ Never say "no comment" - it sounds guilty. Use a holding statement instead.
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During a Crisis: Response

First 2 hours

- ☐ Assess: what has happened? What do you know for certain? What is rumour or speculation?
- ☐ If it's a safeguarding matter: follow your safeguarding procedure immediately. Contact the police if a child or vulnerable adult is at risk. Everything else comes second.

Where to go for safeguarding advice. Nothing on this site is safeguarding guidance and we do not write any. Your denomination's safeguarding policy and its safeguarding team are the authority, and they take precedence over anything here. For independent advice, [thirtyone:eight](#) runs a helpline for churches on **0303 003 1111**; the **NSPCC Helpline** is **0808 800 5000**. Allegations against an adult working with children go to your **local authority LADO**. If a child or adult is at immediate risk, call **999**.

- ☐ Inform key people using the contact tree (phone calls, not text or email)
- ☐ Do NOT post on social media yet
- ☐ Do NOT respond to social media comments or speculation yet
- ☐ If journalists call: use the holding statement. Do not improvise.

First 24 hours

- ☐ Issue a holding statement if needed (adapt one of the templates below)
- ☐ Brief the congregation - by email if appropriate, by phone for those directly affected
- ☐ Contact your denomination's communications team for advice and support
- ☐ If the story is in the media or on social media: post your official statement on your own channels
- ☐ Designate one person to monitor social media - do not get drawn into arguments

Ongoing

- ☐ Provide regular updates even if the update is "there's nothing new to share yet"
- ☐ Maintain a single point of contact for all enquiries
- ☐ Log all communications: who said what, when, to whom
- ☐ Check in on the wellbeing of those managing the crisis - they need support too
- ☐ Coordinate with your denomination before making any public statements

Template Holding Statements

These are starting points. Adapt them to your situation, but keep them short, factual and calm.

1. Safeguarding concern

"We take safeguarding extremely seriously. We are working with [the relevant authorities / our denominational safeguarding team] and are unable to comment further at this time. If you have concerns, please contact [named safeguarding lead] or the police."

Important: Never name the person involved. Never speculate about what happened. Never say anything that could compromise an investigation.

2. Minister departure (unexpected)

"We can confirm that [name] has [stepped down from / been suspended from] their role at [church name]. [Denomination] is supporting us through this transition. Services and activities will continue as planned. If you have questions, please contact [church officer name]."

Note: If the departure is linked to a safeguarding matter, use the safeguarding template instead. Take advice from your denomination before saying anything publicly.

3. Building emergency

"Due to [incident], our building at [address] is temporarily closed. Sunday services will take place at [alternative venue / online]. We will update you as the situation develops."

Follow up with: Insurance claim details (internally), practical arrangements and a timeline for reopening when you have one.

4. Media enquiry (general)

"Thank you for your enquiry. We are [aware of the situation / looking into this]. Please direct all media enquiries to [named person, email, phone]."

Remember: You are not obliged to give interviews. You are not obliged to respond immediately. It is always better to say "we'll come back to you" than to say something you'll regret.

After a Crisis: Recovery

The crisis itself may last hours or days, but the recovery takes longer. Don't skip this phase.

Within 2 weeks

- ☐ Hold a debrief meeting with everyone who was involved
- ☐ What happened? (factual timeline)
- ☐ What went well?
- ☐ What would we do differently?
- ☐ Were there any gaps in our preparation?

Ongoing recovery

- ☐ Update your crisis plan based on lessons learnt
 - ☐ Provide pastoral care for those directly affected
 - ☐ Provide pastoral care for the volunteers and leaders who managed the crisis (this is often forgotten)
 - ☐ Review and update your holding statements
 - ☐ If trust has been damaged: plan how you'll rebuild it (this takes time and consistency, not a single announcement)
 - ☐ Thank the people who helped
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Annual Crisis Communications Review

Go through this checklist once a year, ideally at a church council or leadership team meeting:

- ☐ Crisis communications lead and deputy are still in post and contactable
 - ☐ Contact tree is up to date (names, phone numbers, email addresses)
 - ☐ Denominational contacts are current
 - ☐ Insurance policy details are accessible and up to date
 - ☐ Template holding statements have been reviewed and are still appropriate
 - ☐ Social media login details are held by at least two people
 - ☐ The person designated to speak to media is still willing and available
 - ☐ Safeguarding policy and procedures are up to date
 - ☐ All key volunteers know what to do if a journalist contacts them
 - ☐ This document has been shared with new church council or leadership team members
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Key Contacts to Have on File

Contact	Name	Phone	Email
Crisis communications lead			
Deputy			
Safeguarding officer			
Church officer 1			
Church officer 2			
Denominational comms team			
Denominational press office			
Denominational safeguarding			
Insurance company			
Insurance policy number			

Fill this in and keep it somewhere accessible – printed in the vestry, saved on a shared drive or both.