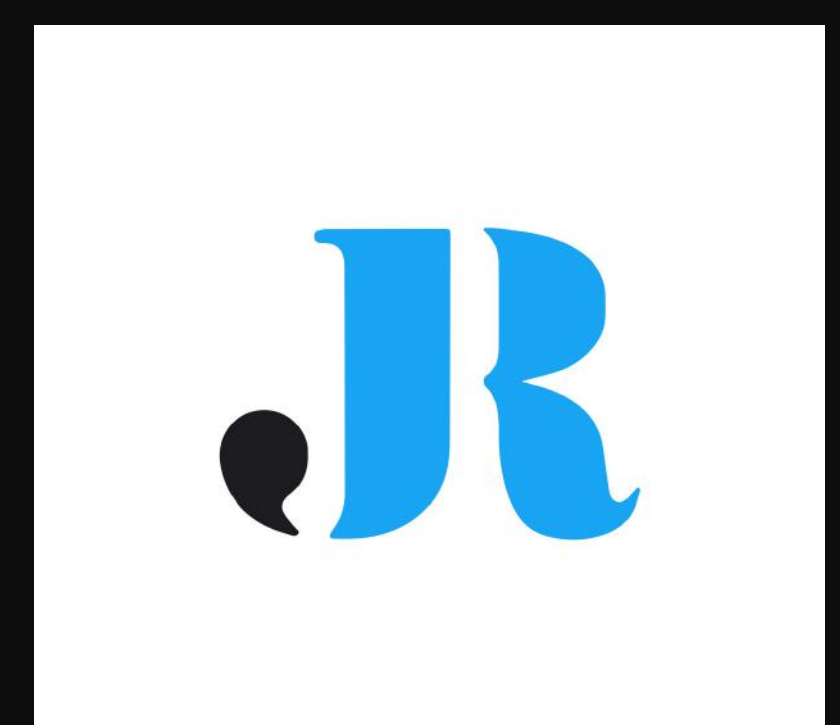


ONLINE COURSE TO HELP PREPARE CHURCHES FOR A
PR CRISIS

CALM IN THE
STORM
Workbook

JERSEY ROAD PR



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Jersey Road PR

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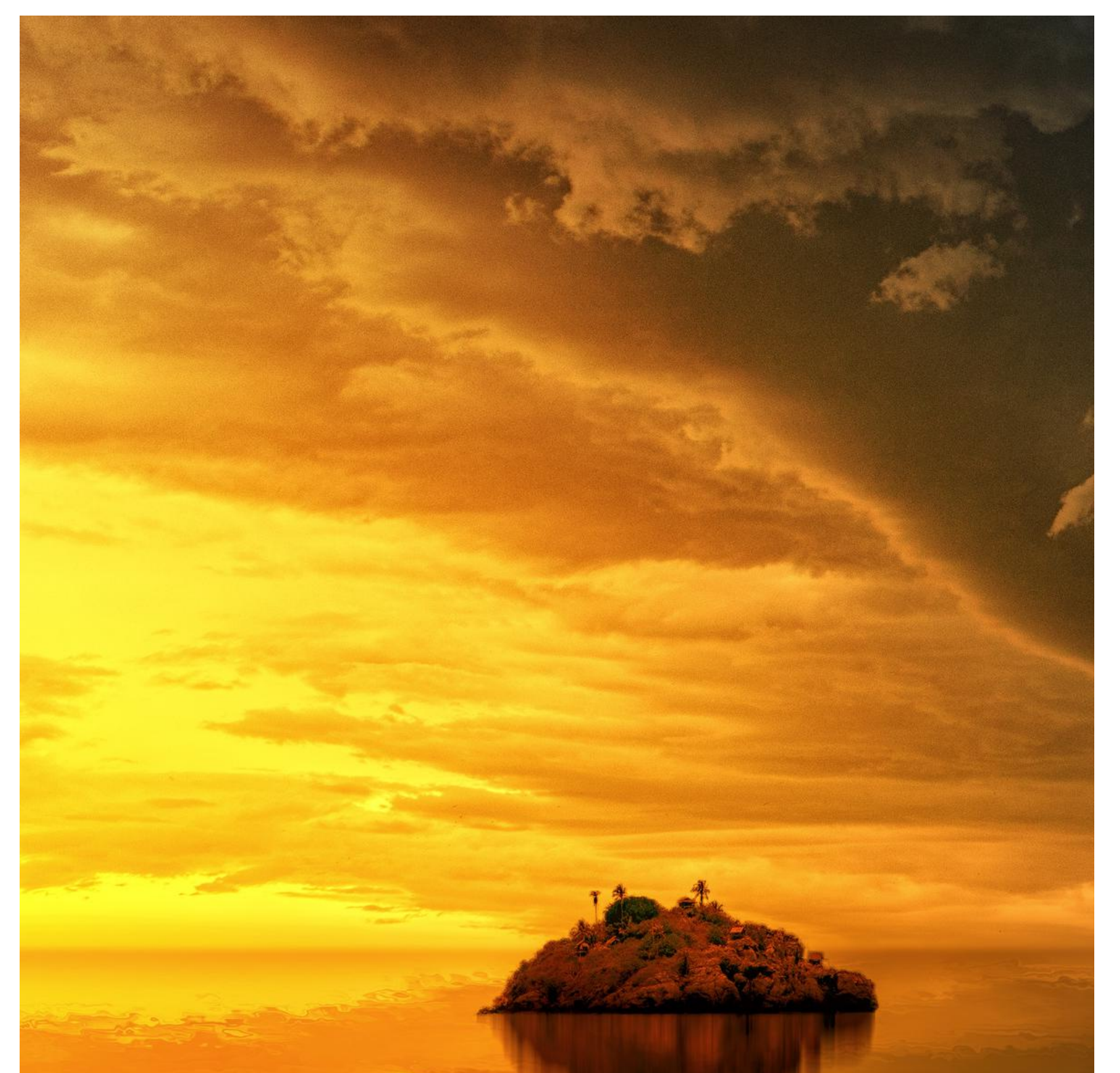
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Introduction

A very warm welcome to you and your team as you embark together on Jersey Road PR's crisis communications course for churches, Calm in the Storm.

At Jersey Road, we have been helping Christian organisations and churches communicate effectively for more than a decade. As managing director – and a former church leader myself – I know the pain a PR crisis can cause, but also that responding calmly and thoughtfully can prevent a short-term issue from turning into a longer-term crisis for your church. So we've developed this course to equip you as church leaders to handle a crisis well.

This workbook is a practical guide to accompany the e-learning videos, giving you the tools you need to identify, prepare for, prevent and deal with a crisis in your particular church context.

Coming up, you will find great tips to digest, useful charts to help you evaluate your church's reputation and any risks you need to be aware of, and real life story examples.

The workbook also includes a series of short exercises, which you can read, discuss, and complete after watching the relevant video segment.



We have designed these exercises to form the building blocks of your church's crisis communications plan. By working through these with your leadership team, you will develop your own bespoke plan, which you can save and review every few months to check it is still relevant to your current situation.

Our aim for you is to come out of this course with a foundational understanding of good crisis communications, and the confidence to know what you need to do if a crisis hits.

If you've got any further questions, or would like additional training or support, get in touch at hello@jerseyroadpr.com and we'll be happy to help.

Gareth Russell

**MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER
JERSEY ROAD PR**



Jersey Road PR brings voice, profile and influence to faith-based organisations who want to change the world.

We're a specialist PR agency for churches and Christian organisations working around the world. We help you understand your audiences, messages and goals, and develop effective PR strategies to help you reach those audiences and engage them in your mission.

jerseyroadpr.com



MEET THE

team



GARETH RUSSELL

Managing Director

An expert in building global brands and campaigns, Gareth has successfully delivered measurable results for Jersey Road's clients in both reputation and crisis management for over a decade. Gareth established and led a church in Milton Keynes for eight years with his wife, Andi, seeing high level growth and impact through training, equipping and releasing new leaders. Gareth is passionate about helping church leaders and faith-based organisations realise their potential.



THERESA STONE

Training & Development Manager

As an experienced broadcast journalist and PR professional, Theresa helps organisations speak more powerfully into the public arena through facilitating live training sessions on crisis communications response and developing media interviewing skills. Following a Masters' degree in multi-media Journalism, Theresa worked extensively with third sector organisations.



SARANN BUCKBY

Account Director for Crisis Communications

Sarann has 20 years' PR agency and consulting experience in PR, digital content marketing and social media. Sarann specialises in offering strategic direction and counsel to Jersey Road's clients on crisis communications projects, including in the digital arena. She draws on her experience founding a communications agency in South Africa which focused on the integration of PR and social media marketing.

PRODUCTION team



CHARIS GIBSON

Director of Communications

Charis has more than 20 years' experience in journalism, PR and communications. As a former crime correspondent who has held senior communications roles in charities and PR agencies, Charis has responded to numerous crises, both as a journalist and PR professional. For this Jersey Road e-learning project, Charis has specialised in directing the content, scripting, website and onsite and offsite production.



ANDREW HORTON

Producer

Andrew is a content producer and journalist with more than 20 years of professional experience in video production, podcasting, social media management, broadcast news, and news writing.



DAN JOLLIFFE

Videographer

Dan is the founder of Clear Aperture Media. He started as a photographer and has since worked with clients building websites, producing videos and seeing their visions come to life in digital and printed design.

module one

Stormy times

This module explores the importance of a church's reputation, the damage a PR crisis can cause and how developing a considered, Christlike crisis response can protect your church's witness.

1.2. The impact of a PR crisis



HOW TO RESPOND TO A

Crisis



“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Philippians 2: 6-7

module two

What could possibly go wrong?

This module looks at the most common public crises churches face and how an internal issue becomes a PR crisis, before introducing the three-step process to managing a media crisis.

WHAT IS A Crisis?

2.1. What is a crisis

A crisis is a event, accusation or perception that seriously threatens the reputation - or even the viability - of an organisation.

In this exercise, you will look at some of the main types of PR crises that churches can face and examples of how the media have covered these.



EXERCISE: Read the list overleaf and click on the links provided to see the stories. Choose one story to focus on and ask yourself the following questions:

Why was this newsworthy?

- Why do you think the news outlet ran the story?
- What makes it interesting?

How well did the church respond, if quoted?

- What is my gut reaction to the church's response?
- Do I believe them?
- Does any apology seem genuine?
- Do I think they acted appropriately?

Is there anything the church might have done to prevent the crisis?

- From what you know of the story, are there any measures they could have put in place to stop this from becoming a crisis? Eg safeguarding or other policies, an internal investigation.

What should the church do now?

- Do you think the church needs to take action to repair any damage to its reputation?
- If so, what should it do?

2.2. The top PR crises facing churches

1. SEXUAL ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

Tragically, the vast majority of negative media stories about churches in recent years have involved allegations of sexual impropriety or abuse, particularly by those in positions of power. Stories about these range from huge inquiries (see <https://bit.ly/33hzP2w>) to individual members of the congregation (see <https://bit.ly/33gxiFG>) and stories of the devastating impact this has had on the lives of survivors (see <https://bit.ly/3KdGPhF>).

2. OTHER TYPES OF ABUSE

This can include allegations of physical abuse, bullying (see <https://bbc.in/3Gu8318>) or other types of abuse of power and leadership. One notable example is the significant coverage around Mark Driscoll, which has seen follow up stories in the media seven years after the controversial closure of his church, Mars Hill (see <https://bit.ly/3FxmfoB>).

3. FINANCIAL MISCONDUCT

This includes stories of embezzlement, fraud or other financial mismanagement or dishonesty, such as those in church leadership (see <https://bbc.in/3zYtx3M>) or with access to church funds (see <https://bit.ly/33bBwPa>).

4. CONTROVERSIAL VIEWS

This kind of story often involves a controversy or rift between the theology or attitudes of the church and the prevailing culture. Often this theology has been long-held without incident, but it becomes a crisis when a particular person or event makes it newsworthy - such as when Sir Keir Starmer made a public apology for visiting Jesus House because of the church's views on homosexuality. This story broke on Twitter and received wide coverage from the mainstream media (see <https://bbc.in/3qgrYZ6>; <https://bit.ly/3I9iVC5>). It can also stem from what's said from the pulpit. This senior pastor in the US caused an uproar when he used scripture to condone sexual violence within a marriage (see <https://bit.ly/3nWZ1SV>).

5. ARGUMENTS OR SPLITS

These stories also often come about due to theological or cultural disputes, but within churches - for instance, over Covid restrictions or gay marriage (see <https://reut.rs/3tpUQma>)

6. ACCIDENTS, ATTACKS OR DISASTERS

Thankfully, these stories are relatively rare, and they can be hard to predict. However a physical accident, attack or disaster happening on church property or involving a church member can lead to significant media coverage for the church - such as the stabbing of Sir David Amess MP in a church (see <https://bit.ly/3qrfxML>) or the Liverpool bomber who attended an Alpha course for asylum seekers (see <https://bbc.in/33bHSy0>).

7. TECHNOLOGY: DATA LOST OR COMPROMISED

Although this may be top of your concerns, it should always be on your radar. Data breaches occur when private and sensitive information is digitally stolen and it has the potential to cost you, not just in time and money, but also your reputation among your congregation and beyond. It can often happen through a third-party vendor that you may be using within your church. For example, Christian crowdfunding site GiveSendGo (legitimately used by many churches and missions) experienced a data breach revealing that millions of dollars had been raised on the site for far-right groups, exposing donations made by some high profile people (see <https://bit.ly/3fwCDv6>).

HOW A CRISIS CAN Begin

2.3. How does a crisis become a story?



01

The media tip-off

Someone alerts the media, who decide it is newsworthy. They should contact anyone accused of wrongdoing for comment before publishing.

The official allegation

An official allegation is made - for example, in a police statement, in court or in a council meeting. The media do not have to seek a comment from the person accused.



02



03

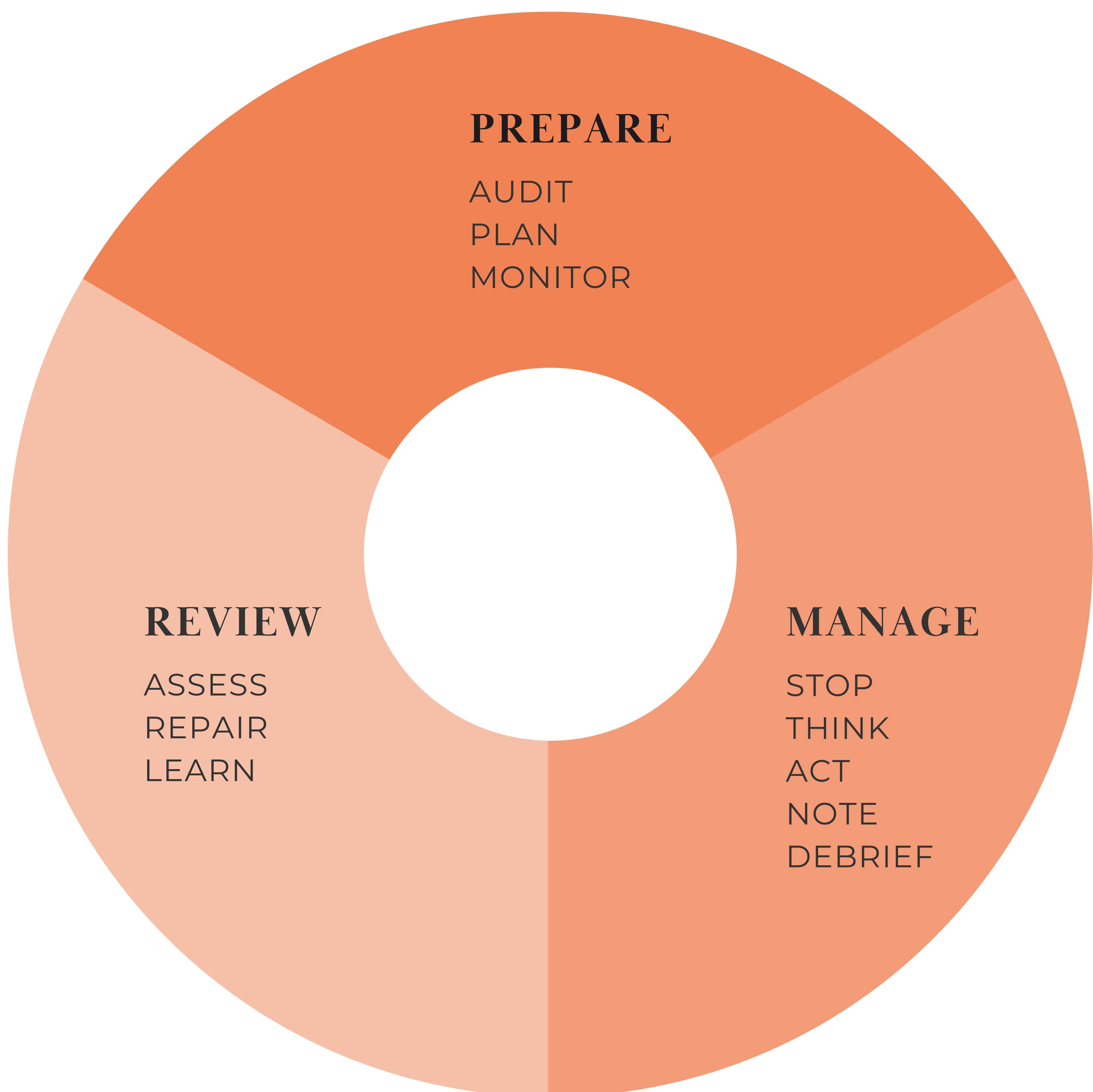
The social media accusation

Someone posts an allegation on social media. This can be shared quickly and easily, whether it is true or not.

YOUR 3-STEP CRISIS Strategy

2.4. Prepare, Manage, Review

Following this practical process puts you in the best position to prevent, respond to and recover from a crisis.



1 module three

Building your storm defences

Planning for a crisis is crucial to ensuring you deal with it well – and may prevent it from happening in the first place. This module gives you the tools and guidance you need to be crisis ready.

6 STEPS TO A Crisis Plan

3.1. Introducing your Crisis Plan



FIRST Know the procedures

Know the procedures recommended by your church network or denomination in a crisis situation.



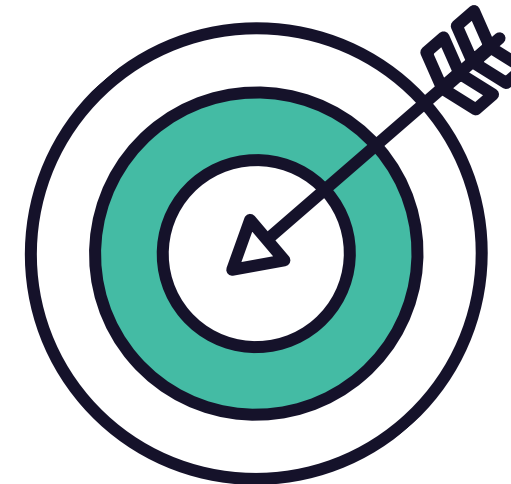
SECOND Form your crisis team

Decide on who should form part of your Crisis Team. Go to page 7 of the Appendix Crisis Plan to fill in the required roles.



THIRD Perform a crisis audit

Assess the risks, issues, and crises that you could face, or are already dealing with, as a church. Go to page 10 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



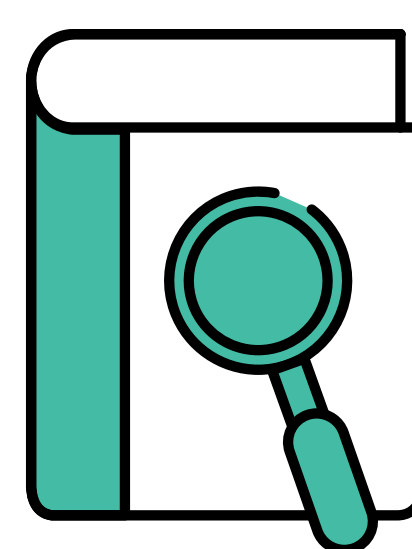
FOURTH Identify your audiences

It's important to know who should speak to in a crisis situation and how to prioritise your communication. Go to page 15 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



FIFTH Craft your crisis messaging

Develop your key messages to be as prepared as possible should your church face a crisis. Go to page 18 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



SIXTH Monitor to scan for crises

Set up monitoring for media and social media, along with conducting an internal scan for risk issues that might escalate. Go to page 23 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.

NOTES

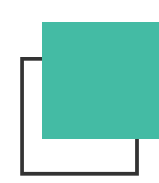
Quotations

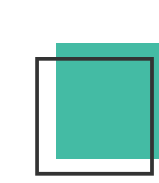
“The willingness of an organisation to acknowledge the limitations of its own knowledge and to communicate the nature of that uncertainty are important aspects of a responsible approach to crisis incubation.”

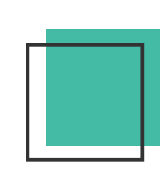
Professor Dennis Smith, University of Sheffield

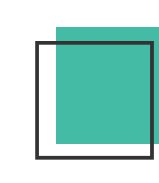
WHY PLAN FOR A CRISIS?

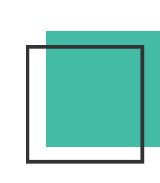
Issues can become crises and damage your reputation unless you:

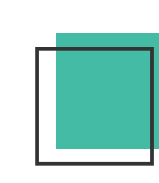
 Plan and ensure you are aware of risks facing you as a church.

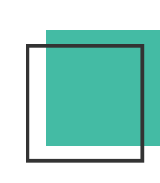
 Have the right policies, procedures, insurances and safeguarding in place.

 Ensure you have the right compliance and monitoring in place.

 Monitor and understand external opinions so you avoid 'bubble' thinking.

 Are wise in all areas of your governance, from recruitment to managing your buildings

 Avoid a 'blame' culture. It's much harder to identify and resolve issues in cultures that foster blame. Whistleblowing should be a last resort.

 Make sure you take any complaints or concerns seriously, investigating them carefully and doing your utmost to act with integrity and accountability.

NOTES



3.2. Your Crisis Team



EXERCISE

Assign crisis roles within your team - go to page 7-8 in the Appendix Crisis Plan

Your crisis team is the group of people responsible for how your church responds to a crisis. We've separated out the main communication roles in page 7 of your Appendix Crisis Plan, but one person is likely to take on a few of these responsibilities, especially if you are in a very small team.



Check if your denomination or network has an in-house communications person who can offer you crisis support, or an external consultant to help if a crisis hits. Make sure you capture their details in the table provided in your Appendix Crisis Plan.

STEPS FOR YOUR Crisis Audit



EXERCISE

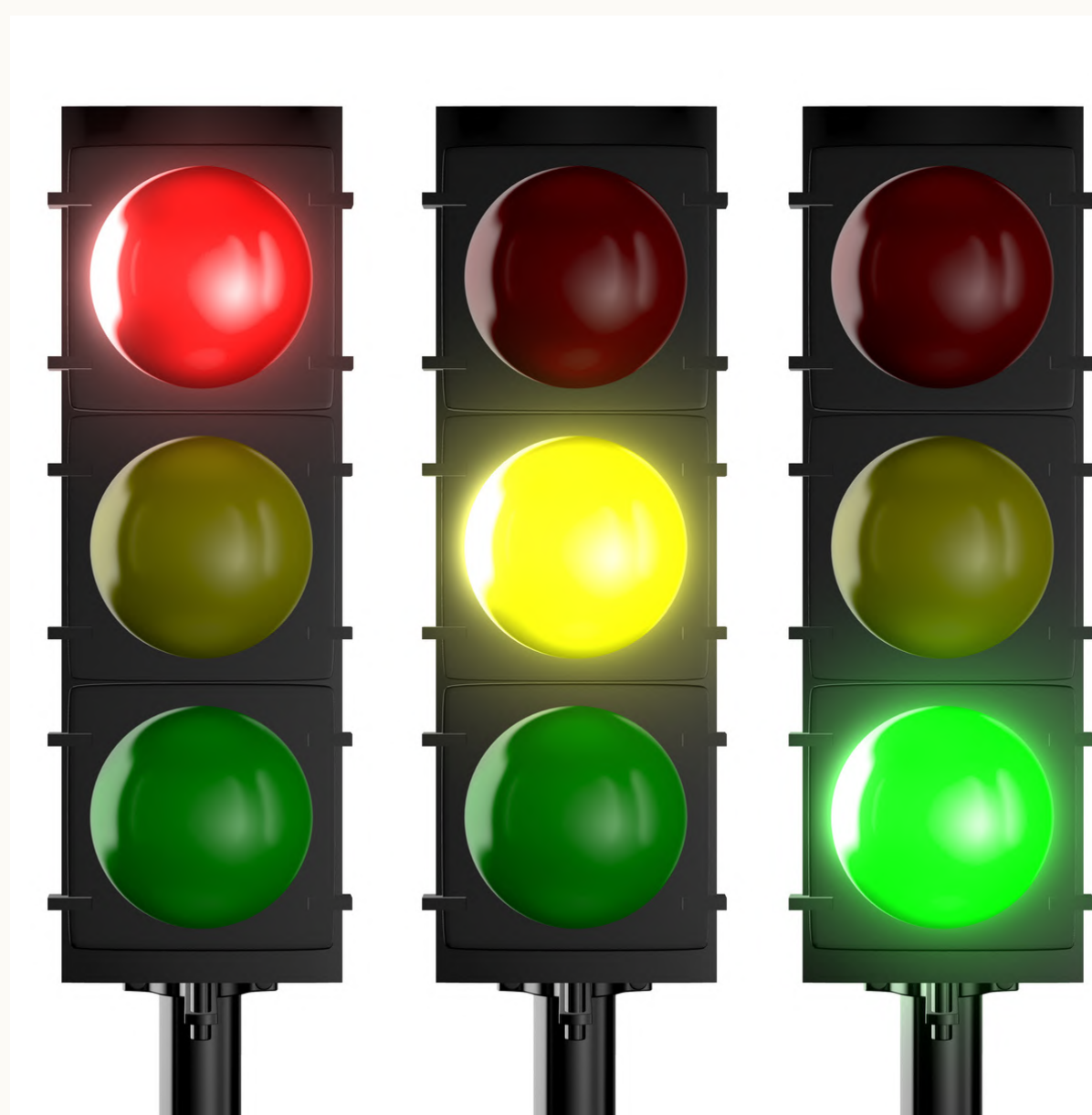
3.3. Crisis Audit: Appendix Crisis Plan pages 10-14



FIRST STEP

Identify the risks

Gather your crisis team and key people who can bring value by adding a diversity of opinions, while keeping things confidential. Identify potential risks or issues (see pages 13-14) and think if there is anything else you should consider, either as an internal risk or potential external issues that could affect your church.



SECOND STEP

Rate the risks

Rate the risks you've identified by asking yourself two main questions, using the RAG rating on page 27 to help



THIRD STEP

Mitigate risk & take action

List the Top 5-10 issues risks that are in the red section and yellow section (score of between 10-12) and devise recommendations about policies and procedures that might mitigate these risks, or turn them into opportunities.

YOUR CRISIS Glossary

Here are some useful crisis communications terms that will help you prepare your crisis audit.

CRISIS

A crisis is an event, accusation or perception that seriously threatens the reputation – or even the viability – of an organisation. It can take you by surprise or be a result of slow-burning issues.

RISK

The possibility of something bad happening at some time in the future.

ISSUE

A current problem or concern, influencing your church.

This could include a variety of concerns such as: your carbon footprint, historic abuse allegations, health and safety/compliance, corporate governance, culture wars, board room pay, cyber-crime, flu/health epidemics, availability of skills, mergers and acquisitions etc. Slow burning issues often escalate into crises if not effectively identified and dealt with.

RISK ISSUE

A point of conflict between your church and one or more of its audiences, or a gap between church practice/behaviour and stakeholder expectations.

INSIDE Outside

Types of risks you may face within and outside the church

Go to page 10 in the Appendix Crisis Plan and consider the type of risks, issues, risk issues and crises that could potentially impact your church. Don't just consider those issues you're immediately aware of. The purpose of this exercise is to prepare for a worst case scenario - it may mean having uncomfortable conversations, so the Crisis Team Leader should encourage this. Below are some examples to consider.

In the church

- Sexual misconduct or abuse.
- Other kinds of abuse: spiritual, physical, bullying
- Financial misconduct/ fraud or theft
- Malevolence: sabotage, tampering, disgruntled employee
- Technology: data lost or compromised
- A particular stance on a sensitive subject
- Arguments or splits.

Outside the church

- Culture clashes
- False allegations
- Terrorism
- Health epidemics
- Availability of skills
- Declining church attendance
- Town & country planning policy and regimes
- Credit and interest rates

HOW TO...

Rate Risks

Go to page 11 in the Appendix Crisis Plan and rate the risks, issues, risk issues and crises you identified by asking yourself the two main questions below and using the RAG (Red-Amber-Green) rating diagram in the table provided.

1. HOW LIKELY IS IT?

What safeguards are in place?

- Do we have policies in place to help prevent sexual or financial abuse? If not, make this a priority

Who represents our church in public?

- Are your leaders outspoken and given to being controversial, for instance?
- Do you have a lot of people representing your church in public?

What are people saying about you?

- Are you aware of any complaints or concerns?
- Do you have Google and social media alerts for your church's name set up so that you know what's being said about you online?

2. HOW MUCH DAMAGE COULD IT DO?

Who could it affect and what would the impact be (spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically)?

Could it lead to significant negative media coverage or social media comments?

Could it cause members of your congregation to leave the church or even lose their faith?

Could it cause a loss of public trust in your church and your mission?

Could it lead to your church having to close?

RAG Rating

RAG stands for Red-Amber-Green. Once you've rated each risk in the Crisis Plan, giving a score for both probability and impact (based on worst case scenario), multiply the scores to get your final risk scoring (Probability x Impact = Risk rating).

For all those in the red zone (15 - 25) and between 10-12 in the amber zone, develop an action plan to help prevent these risks from being realised (as far as possible) and develop communication (key messaging and/or holding statements) to help prepare should they develop into a risk issue or crisis.

| | | Probability of risk occurring | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|
| | | 1 Unlikely | 2 Possible | 3 Likely | 4 Very Likely | 5 Almost Certain |
| Impact of risk occurring | 1 Minor: Unlikely to have an impact on the Church | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 2 Moderate: Could have an impact on the Church but can be managed without a major impact in the medium term | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| | 3 Serious: Would have a major impact on the Church | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 |
| | 4 Very serious: Requires major effort to prevent it threatening the Church | 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 |
| | 5 Catastrophic: Would have a major impact on the Church | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |

2 STEPS FOR CRISIS

Audiences



3.4. Crisis Audiences: Appendix Crisis Plan Pages 15-17

STEP 1

Who needs to hear from you?

List the groups of people under these five main headings (see Appendix) that you might need to communicate to in a crisis situation.

1. PUBLIC AUTHORITIES
2. VICTIMS
3. YOUR CONGREGATION
4. YOUR DENOMINATION/NETWORK
5. THE PUBLIC



THINK AND ACT: MEDIA POLICY

Do you have a media and social media policy in place to help direct you, your staff and congregation in a crisis? If not, ask your network or denomination if they have a template you can adapt - we've also included one in the Appendix Crisis Plan, page 17

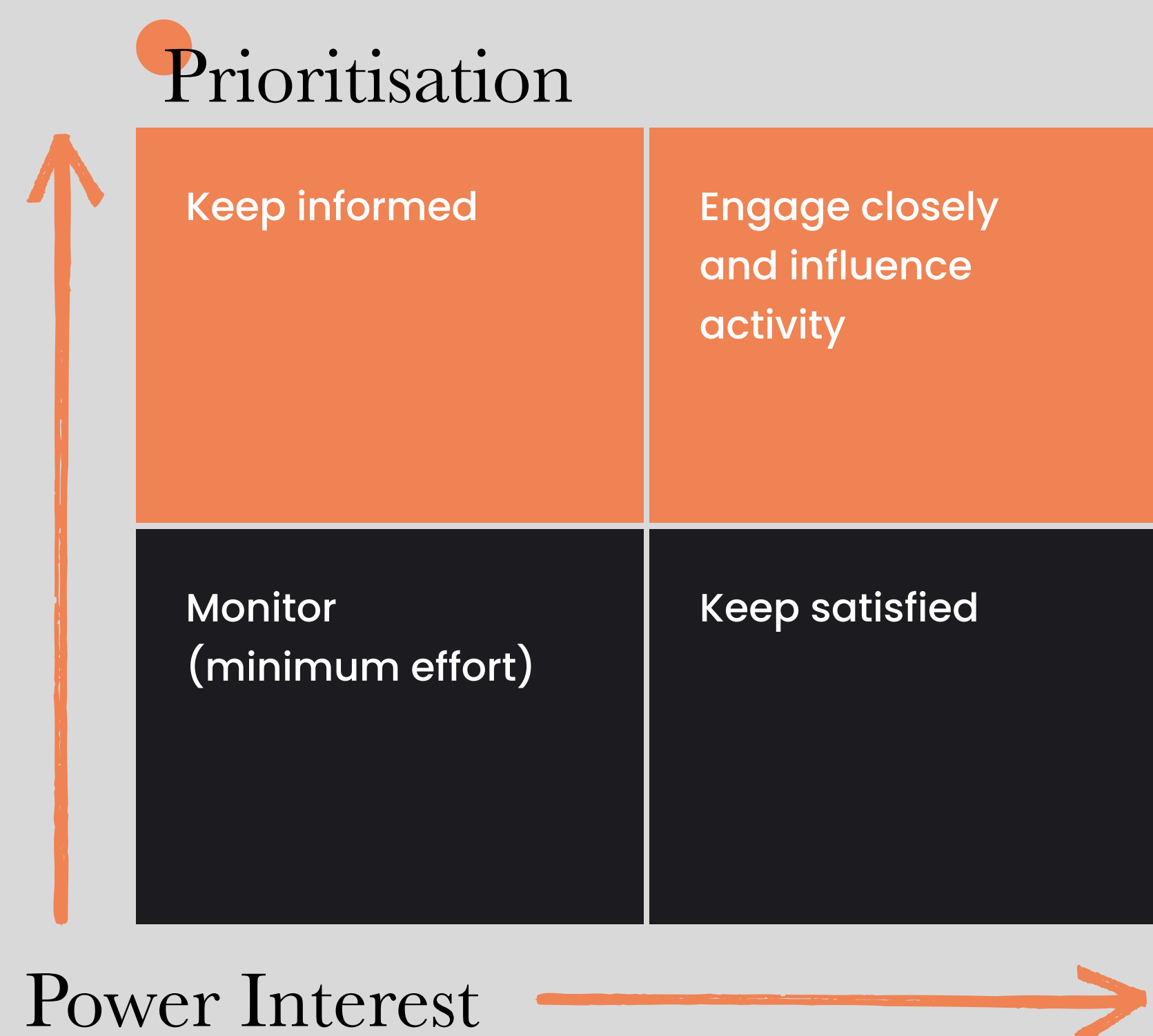
STEP 2

How do you prioritise who needs to hear from you during a crisis?

Using the risks you've identified, plot the different audiences that may be involved on the grid found on page 16 in the Appendix Crisis Plan help you understand who to prioritise in a crisis situation.

Think about the power those audiences have in a particular crisis situation and how interested they would be in the situation.

You might have audiences you would normally not consider, for example the families of the victims of an accident or an employee of a different church/organisation that alleges abuse against one of your church leaders, but would have a high level of interest and power in the crisis situation.



THINK AND ACT: EVALUATING THE INTEREST OF AN AUDIENCE IN A CRISIS SCENARIO

- Do those involved have a public profile – are they a celebrity or do they have notoriety?
- What is their geographical reach – local, regional, national, international?
- How topical is the situation – hot or emerging issue/trend
- What's the timing of the crisis situation – is it Christmas, is the news agenda crowded with other issues?
- Consider the human interest of the situation – are there experiences or emotions to which others can relate?
- What are other influencing factors – likeability or authority (of protagonists), scarcity (new, rare information), social proof (of, say, media interest)

3 STEPS FOR CRISIS Messaging

3.5. Your Crisis Messages: Appendix Crisis Plan Pages 18-22

STEP 1: DEVELOP YOUR KEY MESSAGES

Your denomination or network may already have prepared key messaging or statements for a particular scenario, so it's a good idea to check with them first.



STEP 2: DEVELOP HOLDING STATEMENTS

Look at the top 5-8 risk issues you've identified and develop a holding statement for each one in your Crisis Plan.



STEP 3: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CULTURE CLASHES AND PREPARE YOUR MESSAGING

Make sure to draw on the diverse opinions within your congregation, or even denomination, as well as broader society in this exercise.



GOOD PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

Good principles for developing your key messages:

- Be authentic
- Be agreed
- Be clear
- Be concise
- Be compassionate
- Be believable

HOW TO WRITE YOUR STATEMENTS

Your holding statement should:

- Be short
- Be simple
- Be sympathetic
- Be factual
- Outline intended action
- Commit to fuller response
- Reassure

WHAT CAN TRIGGER A CULTURE CLASH/ WAR?

It could be the result of a single action or sermon, or when your church's stance on a particular issue as a result of Christian/ Biblically-based values offends the core beliefs, values and social norms of those within your own church, denomination or society.

TAKE ACTION

In your Crisis Plan, list the three key messages to have on hand in a crisis that reflect the values you hold as a church.

TOP TIPS

Remember the 'Golden Hour' – the first hour when a crisis hits.

Try and respond within an hour of something going public to ensure you are steering the narrative early on and to help buy you more time to fact-find and develop a fuller response.

WHERE MIGHT THIS HAPPEN AND HOW DO YOU RESPOND?

In your Crisis Plan brainstorm the different scenarios and how you would respond in a particular situation. Read over the next few pages for more background and tips.

STEP 1: DEVELOP YOUR KEY MESSAGES

STEP 2: DEVELOP HOLDING STATEMENTS

STEP 3: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CULTURE CLASHES AND PREPARE YOUR MESSAGING

TOP TIPS

Speaking about the good work you do in the community or the impact you've made over the years can also help reassure in a crisis situation.

Remember: acting with honesty, integrity and love in action can turn a crisis into an opportunity.

TOP TIPS

The holding statements you develop now in your Crisis Plan can be quickly adapted as needed to enable a fast response.

CAUTION: Say enough in your holding statement to buy time. Ensure you have enough facts at your disposal, so you don't say something you have to later retract. Rather delay your response slightly than go out with something you have to change later.

Remember the CARE model when considering what to say.

Position the church as being aware of the situation, concerned and acting on the information.

TOP TIPS

Consider both the message and the platform. If the situation requires a spokesperson to engage in media interviews, be careful about doing pre-recordings as they could reduce your statement to a soundbite, which may lead to it being taken out of context.

Nuance within a culture clash/ war is important. When dealing with media (via prepared statements or interviews) be aware that they will probably cut it down so:

- Publish on your own platforms and link to the full response on social media if there is not sufficient space
- Ensure grace and your values are evident in every sentence, spoken or written
- Find a 'warm' journalist contact to help share your story as fully as possible
- Carefully consider the political bias of the media outlet you're dealing with to assess whether they would be more or less open to your viewpoint
- Remain calm, use a gracious tone when explaining your viewpoint, don't ever attack/blame the person/organisation/church involved and stick to your key messages, underpinned by your core values.

Go to Section 4.4 on PAGE 42 to see how to respond on social media.

What to say _____
_____ in a Crisis

C
Concern

A
Action

R E
REassurance

CULTURE CLASHES & Wars

Understanding culture clashes/wars

In the UK it could be argued that we live in a post-Christian society, which is, according to [GotQuestions](#), "...historically based in Christian ideas and follows simplified Christian values, but rejects the authority of Christianity and does not consider it the basis of either its ethics or its culture."

It's also true that the message and values of the Gospel brought by the early Christians stood contrary to the accepted culture and religion of Rome, until it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD. Today, instead of rotten fruit and eggs being thrown by someone who doesn't like what you have to say or stand for, angry and sometimes hateful words are published in an instant online, taking root with others who feel similarly outraged.

The conflicts that occur when when different cultures or tribes clash are often filled with strong negative emotions (anger or anxiety) that make people want to do something about it. This can lead to either strongly worded or even abusive or bullying behaviour, most often on social media which amplifies voices and can increase polarisation. Rational debate is no longer the default as tribal politics become rife with outrage. And outrage is often what social media platforms' business models thrive on.

CULTURE CLASHES

A situation in which the diverging attitudes, morals, opinions, or customs of two dissimilar cultures or subcultures are revealed (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

EXAMPLE

Outrage in the church and society over a US-based pastor smearing saliva into a parishioner's face during the Covid pandemic to illustrate the story of Jesus healing the blind man.

<https://bit.ly/3GVw7Ku>

CULTURE WARS

A culture war is a cultural conflict between social groups and the struggle for dominance of their values, beliefs, and practices. It commonly refers to topics on which there is general societal disagreement and polarisation in societal values (Wikipedia).

EXAMPLE

This article in [The Guardian](#) provides an overview of culture wars today, with some historical context/background and modern day examples.

<https://bit.ly/3KExPCn>

CRISIS PLAN

Summary

3.6. Crisis Preparation - review and reminder

| TASK | DUE |
|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check with your denomination/ network | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set up your crisis team | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set up monitoring | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange media training | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do your crisis audit - consider culture clashes/wars | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put in safeguards | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consider key audiences | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Draft key messages and holding statements | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | |

We're here to help.

Jersey Road PR can offer workshops, advice and media interview training for your leadership teams and your spokespeople, face-to-face or online.

We can also help you develop your messages or develop a bespoke crisis plan for your church, and we can offer communications support and media liaison during a crisis.

If you'd like to know more, get in touch on hello@jerseyroadpr.com.

module four

When the storm hits

When a PR crisis hits, it's crucial to act quickly and calmly, and to follow your crisis plan. This module offers you a framework for response and guidance on the key decisions you will have to make.

WHAT **now?**

4.1. What to expect when a crisis starts to break

TWO TYPES OF STORM

SQUALL

A storm that happens suddenly and takes you by surprise

HURRICANE

A storm that builds over the ocean (like slow-burning issues in your church), but is only paid attention to when it nears land because of the damage it can cause.

WHAT STEPS DO YOU NEED TO TAKE IMMEDIATELY?



Follow the STAND guide detailed on page 36.

TOP TIP: The first 90 minutes to 24 hours are critical.

Act urgently to:

- Assemble your crisis team and pray
- Discover the facts
- Finalise your holding statement
- Reiterate your media policy
- Be ready to engage with journalists if they confront you

HOW TO RESPOND in a crisis

4.2. The STAND Guide to Crisis Response

S^{top}

- Pause and pray
- Take deep breaths to calm your nervous system



T^{hink}

- Assess the situation
- Investigate the facts
- Consider your audiences



A^{ct}

- Respond quickly but carefully
- Develop your responses
- Prepare your spokesperson
- Inform the authorities



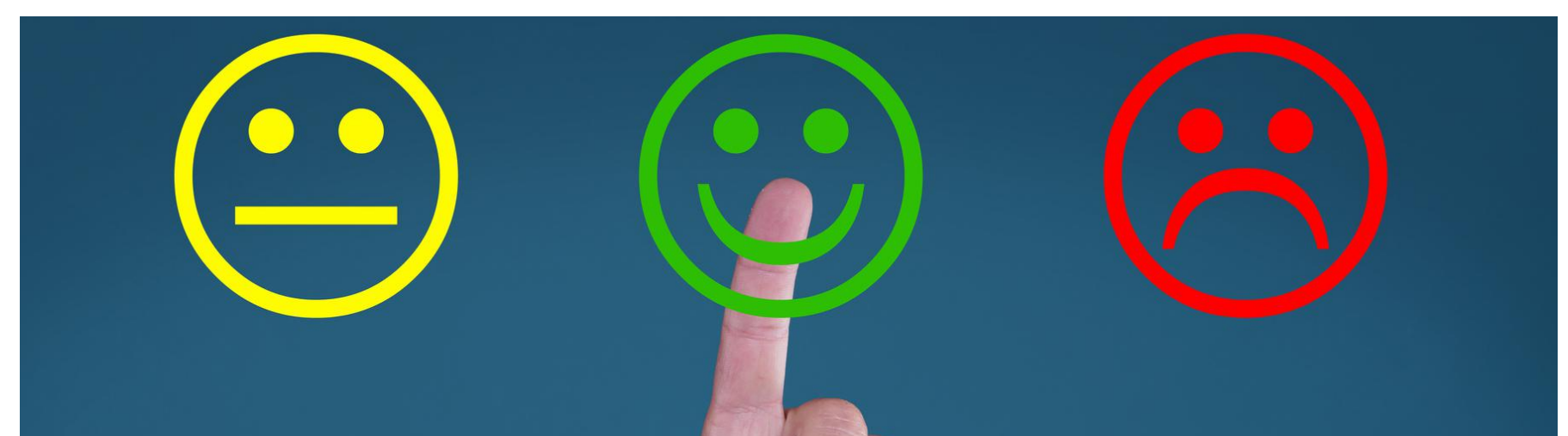
N^{ote}

- The media response
- Internal developments
- Adjust your response if needed



D^{ebrief}

- What caused the crisis?
- How well did you respond?



Think about how you can turn the crisis into an opportunity. Ask yourself as a team:

- How can we model good and humble leadership?
- Is there an opportunity to offer restoration to those hurt?
- If wrongly accused, is there an opportunity to model truth, grace and forgiveness?
- Within a church dispute, is there an opportunity to show how to disagree well in public?
- If your church has made bad decisions or shown bad governance, is there an opportunity for positive change?



HOW BAD **is it?**

Will the crisis have a minor, moderate, serious, very serious or catastrophic impact on your reputation as a church — and even the reputation of the Church more broadly? Assess the severity and impact of the crisis using the guides in this module and take the steps recommended below:



01 Minor to moderate impact

Confined in-house. Managed by 1-2 members of the crisis comms team who update the wider team where necessary and keeping a watching brief. Easily contained - no current media or public attention. May need some proactive, internal responses and review, but it's unlikely to develop and need reactive or external messaging.



02 Serious impact

Mid-level crisis requiring similar responses to the above. May need more team members to be involved in the response as it has received some public, plus local or sector-led media attention and could develop into national. Monitor the situation to assess whether it may develop and external messaging should be prepared and possibly used.



03 Very serious to catastrophic impact

Most serious of crises, deemed a high level of threat to the reputation of your church and even your congregation's support and church survival. It has attracted national negative media coverage and requests for interviews. Hands on support is required from all staff, led and informed by the full crisis comms team, with the key spokesperson (leader) and denominational contact and/or external agency and policy advisor support, where required.

HOW YOU RATE the crisis

Questions to help you rate how serious a crisis is:

Risk? How much is at risk? Where are the risks?

Trajectory? Is the crisis likely to escalate?

Spillover? Is the crisis likely to interfere with normal operation of the church?

Options? What is your ability to influence the environment? What parties need to be influenced?

Control? To what extent is the church responsible for the crisis? Who else is responsible?

Time? How much time is there to manoeuvre?

Spillover? Cause a loss of confidence? Affect the congregation?



Affected parties? Who is affected by the crisis? How?

Interest? Is the crisis likely to foster outside attention beyond the parties affected directly?

Scope? How many choices do we have? What is the quality of those choices?

Communication? What channels of communication will help you reach your priority audiences?

HOW TO SPEAK TO THE Media

4.3. Top Tips for Statements and Interviews

We've looked at the actions you need to take. Now let's explore how you can best communicate through written media statements, interviews, social media or anywhere online. Base your communications on the key messages you've identified in your Crisis Plan or, if you need to start from scratch, the messaging section in Module 3 will help.

TOP TIPS

The 3 C's of Communication

- Be clear
 - Be compelling
 - Be consistent
-

Press release/statement

- Demonstrate concern and compassion in the language
 - Demonstrate actions you are taking
 - Be reassuring
 - Keep it short and simple
 - Include confirmed facts only
 - Don't speculate
-

Media interviews

- Prepare for likely questions
 - Identify your main messages
 - Start with compassion
 - Be factual and honest
 - Think about how you look and sound
-

How to decide when your spokesperson should speak to the media



See the checklist on the next page



Trust

IS SOMETHING
BUILT OVER
TIME



Professor Nicole Gillespie, from the University of Queensland, is an expert in rebuilding organisational trust. She teaches large teams something we all instinctively know - trust takes time to develop.

CHECKLIST FOR MEDIA Interviews

How do you decide whether or not you should offer the media the opportunity to speak to your spokesperson?

Use the checklist below:

- Is an interview the right approach?

- Would a statement be an acceptable option given the seriousness of the situation and level of media and public interest?

- Do we have the right person to do a media interview in this specific situation?

- Are they media trained?

- Do they feel confident to do media interviews?

- Can they answer difficult questions well in practice interviews?

- Are they able to present a calm and compassionate tone without getting flustered or angry under pressure?

- Do they know the messages they need to get across and do they understand how they will do this?

YOUR APPROACH WITH Social Media

4.4. How to respond on social media



THINK: Social media could well be the first place where a crisis breaks. People may comment on your channels or tag you, to challenge you or make allegations.

When to get involved

- Monitor media and social media activity to help you decide
- Being proactive can build transparency and trust
- But speaking proactively could also jump the gun and amplify the problem
- However you respond in public, take the right actions behind the scenes

Responding to negative comments

- Correct misinformation
- Take the conversation off public platforms where possible, but remember they can always be shared online
- Be transparent
- Set the rules
- Use the handy diagram on the next page to help you understand when and how to respond online

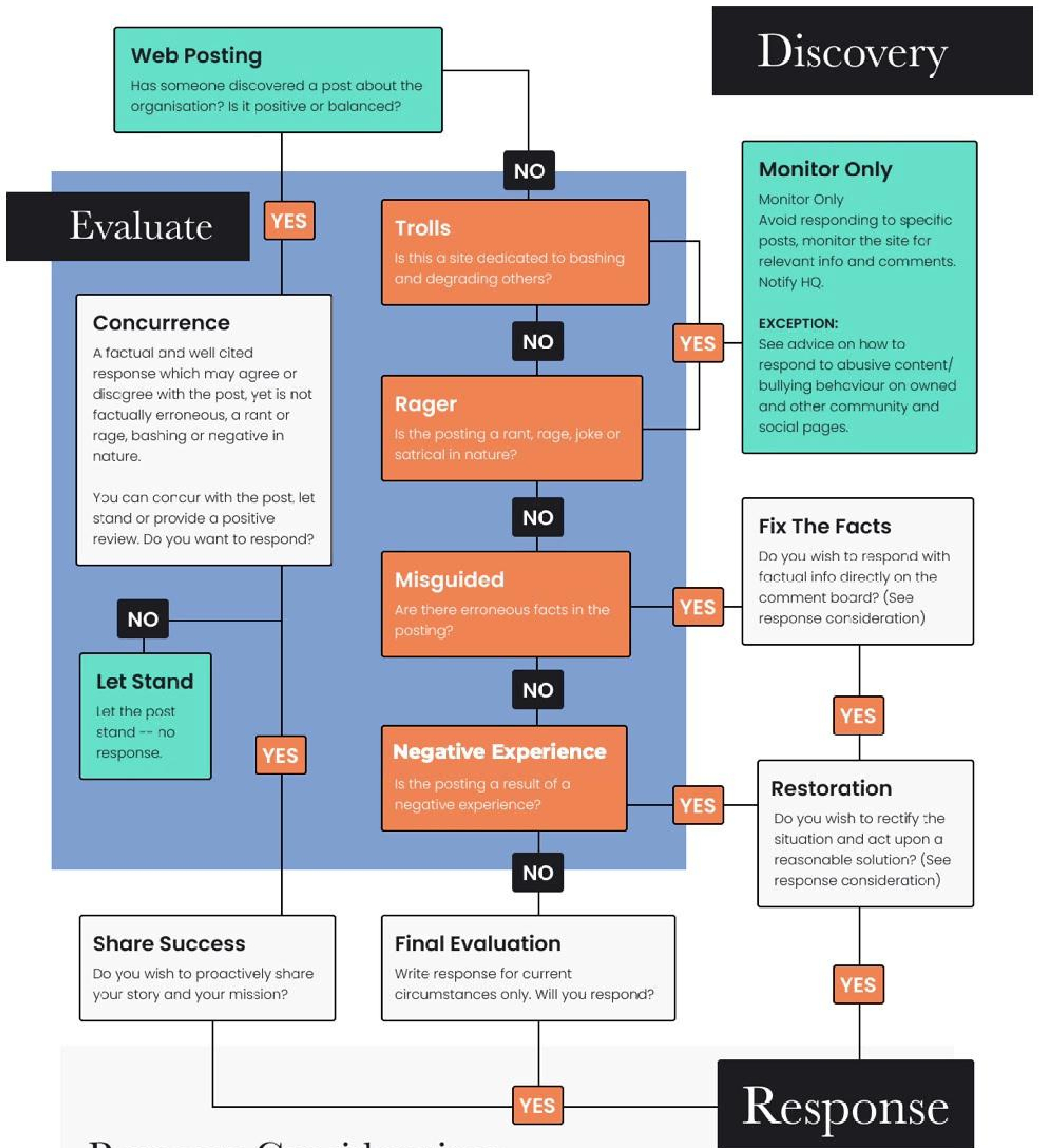
Social media timing

- If you start to see negative comments on social media, the timing of your response will matter.
- You can address a problem immediately without giving away all the information – if you are still waiting for the details.
- Keep your message short. If appropriate, you can link back to a fuller statement on your website.

Brief staff and congregation

- Remind them of your media and social media policy

RESPONDING Online



Response Considerations

Transparency

Disclose your connection.

Sourcing

Cite your sources by including links, video, images or other references.

Timeliness

Take time to create good responses. Don't rush.

Tone

Respond in a tone that reflects the culture of the Church.

Influence

Focus on the most used sites/ resources used by the Church.

RESPONDING TO Culture Clashes

To delete or not to delete

The most important thing to consider when taking action to deal with posts from an angry online mob is intent. Kate Hartley, author of 'Communicate in a Crisis: understand, engage and influence consumer behaviour to maximise brand trust' says, "Your intent should be your guide in deciding whether to remove or censor content. Why do you want it gone? Is it because it's inaccurate, untrue, abusive or genuine error (all good reasons)? Or is it just inconvenient?"

There is a big difference between responding to trolls/haters who are abusive, rather than those who are critical of your church, propagating inaccuracies or have a genuine grievance. The decision tree on page 43, originally developed by the Air Force Association, will be a guide in those different scenarios.

There is sometimes a case for deleting content on your own social pages or requesting that it be deleted from others. Read below for some principles suggested by Hartley before deleting or requesting anything.

DELETING CONTENT FROM YOUR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA

If something is untrue or the result of a hack, delete the content but be transparent about the reasons why and share the facts.

If they share abusive content (vs. just critical content) or bullying behaviour and you have clearly stated community guidelines in place that prohibit such behaviour, you can delete their posts.

- Inform them of the reasons to give them a chance to repost without the abusive language.
- In some cases it may be appropriate to respond if it allows you to publicly reinforce your values.

REQUESTING CONTENT IS DELETED FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S SOCIAL MEDIA

The intention behind your request is key. You can't ask something to be removed because you don't like what it says and it may make the situation even worse.

However, if it is potentially abusive or a lie, you can ask for it to be removed or report to the relevant site owner or authorities. Be sure to elaborate why you want the content removed, using the facts.

DON'T DELETE WHEN...

It's factually accurate or you don't like what they're saying or how they're portraying your church.

five module

After the storm

Your recovery from a crisis depends on your actions in the long term. This module explores how to reflect and respond after a crisis, making necessary changes and building trust for the future.

REVIEW TO **rebuild**

You are now at the stage of looking into rebuilding your reputation and restoring trust. There are simple practical exercises to look at now, to complete your journey, which are included in the Appendix Crisis Plan from page 32.



01 Future actions

Your future actions timeline - identifying the steps you need to take over the next six months. See pages 33-35 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



02 Brainstorm

Brainstorm with your crisis team - identifying what you learned from the crisis, what you did well, what you would do differently and how you can prepare better for a future crisis scenario. See pages 36-38 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



03 Recovery Plan

What is your ongoing recovery plan? This is your roadmap which will take your team smoothly into the future. See pages 39-44 in the Appendix Crisis Plan.



GET IN **Touch**

We'd love to hear from you...

If you would like to speak to a member of the team about interview training, crisis consultancy or emergency crisis support, please get in touch with Jersey Road PR.

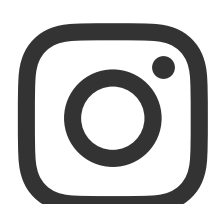
We'd also love to hear from you if you have any feedback on the course or there are other areas of church PR that you would like us to address in future training.



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