

Basic Principles of Media Interaction

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The Media in the Mindset of the Church

- The Second Vatican Council in 1963 published a decree on the Means (Media) of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*.
- Every year since 1967 on January 24, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, the patron saint of journalists, the Popes have published a Message for the World Day of Communications, on media themes.
- We see in Pope Francis' outreach how he seeks through the secular media to communicate with those who otherwise would not hear the Gospel.
- The media are a key way to speak to the modern areopagus.



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The Media Are Not The Enemy

- The media are an industry with a craft (journalism) and a product (story).
- Most in the media are just trying to do their jobs, to tell a story truthfully in a way readers will find interesting. In their stories, they amplify, simplify and make relevant.
- Just as those in the media should have no general prejudice against the Church, so Catholics should have no general prejudice against the media.
- At the same time, we should not be naïve: media professionals may have some biases and certainly blind spots, and some members have clear agendas.

Engaging the Media Effectively

- Many in the media do not know how to cover the Church. They are like people who don't know baseball trying to cover the World Series.
- We should be media friendly, clear, patient, engaging, “joyful messengers of challenging proposals,” as Pope Francis summons.
- The media — old and new — are a very important modern pulpit to be able to get out the Church's message, despite the fact that the message is occasionally distorted in transmission.

Engaging the Media Effectively

- Most in the media do not consider what the Church does “news.” They’re interested only when something is “new” (like a national Eucharistic pilgrimage), when there’s “bad news,” or when something fits into a secularist theme (like the decline of religion in society).
- Regardless, whenever they reach out, it is an opportunity to reach some people we otherwise wouldn’t with the Gospel and the witness of faith in God, as well as to dispel confusion, to give context, to explain and clarify.

Engaging the Media Effectively

- Media interaction is not just meant to be *responsive*. It's also supposed to be, in the traditional sense of the term, *propaganda*, literally proposing our story and seeking to make it newsworthy. With the new media — social media, blogs — and improved technology, getting our message out is easier and less expensive than ever.
- In either situation, effective communication involves both the theological (faith, hope and love) and cardinal virtues (prudence, courage, justice, temperance) as well as humility, truthfulness, clarity, accountability, passion and positivity.

Preparing for Interviews

- When speaking to the media, it's important to know what story the journalist is interested in, who the audience is (national or local) and, most importantly, what you want to emphasize.
- You should go into an interview with 1-3 priorities and try to direct (“reframe”) your responses to those main emphases. Reframing well is more important the shorter the interview (like on TV).



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Preparing for Interviews

- In speaking with most Catholic media, they will seldom ask “gotcha” questions, but with secular media, particularly occasionally hostile secular media, we should try to anticipate tough or controversial questions they might ask and have crisp and credible responses to them, preferably shifting back to our 1-3 priorities.
- Controversies and tough questions can be used to communicate our message.
- To do so effectively, however, we must understand arguments against the Church, find the positive intention (if there is one), and start our response there.



Preparing for Interviews

- To reframe, we first need to understand the frame that exists. These are among the more common frames that secular media can bring when covering the Church:
 - Institutions versus victims
 - Narrow interests versus the common good.
 - The present and future versus the past
 - Science versus faith and dogma
 - Subjective experience over tradition
 - Autonomy and freedom versus rules.



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Preparing for Interviews

- The specific issues that some in the media (secular and Catholic) want to focus, and for which we ought to be prepared to reframe:
 - Political questions – abortion, LGBT, religious freedom, the presidential election
 - Ecclesiastical Questions – The rise of the nones, synodality, sexual abuse, women priests, priestly celibacy, worthiness of Holy Communion, support for Pope Francis.
 - Theological Questions – Miracles, transubstantiation.
 - Liturgical Questions – The TLM, *ad orientem*, communion on hands,
 - Protestant Questions – The “idolatry” of the Eucharist, the nature of the Church, the Pope.
 - Eucharistic Revival Questions – The cost, the emphasis



Examples

- “How do you respond to objections that tax dollars are being used to provide security for this sectarian pilgrimage?”
- “Do you agree with the latest Vatican decree to bless same-sex couples?”
- “Should this Pilgrimage and Revival even be taking place when the Pope wants everyone focusing on the Synod on Synodality?”
- “Do you think President Biden, who supports abortion, should receive Holy Communion?”
- “How can you as a woman support an institution that says that you cannot be a priest and celebrate the Eucharist?”
- “With the rise of the nones and massive disaffiliation from organized religion, isn’t this pilgrimage irrelevant?”
- “Do you agree with Pope Francis’ restriction of the traditional Latin Mass?”
- “The Church opposes trans people, saying gender transition is contrary to nature. What would you say to those who say that’s nothing compared to what Catholics choose to think, that bread and wine are able to change their entire substance into Jesus Christ?”



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General Tips

- If a critical question is asked, look for the positive intention before the criticism and try to connect with it briefly at the beginning of the response.
- Seek to shed light not heat. Don't be defensive or angry in response to a tough question.
- Be positive and full of compassion and understanding.
- “Show” more than “tell.” Illustrate.
- Have some facts ready at hand to communicate the point and show mastery of the subject.



General Tips

- People remember how we made them feel long after what we said. If someone thinks a Catholic is a “hater,” and instead only encounters love and mercy, the person will be more prone to listen.
- We can give effective witness, without necessarily “winning” an argument in an interview.
- Against criticism, we can speak about our own experience and the faith and work of the Church.



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Bridge Statements for Reframing

- “What’s at stake is...”
- “I think what you meant was...”
- “It seems to me the real question is...”
- “What is important is ...”
- “We have to remember that...”
- “The point is...”
- “The way I see it is ...”



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What Should We Be Emphasizing in Interviews?

- “We Catholics believe, based on Jesus’ words and actions, that the Eucharist is not a holy thing, or even a thing at all, but is Jesus Christ under sacramental appearances.”
- “We feel incredibly privileged and happy to be walking with the Eucharistic Jesus to Indianapolis, asking him to bless our beloved country and all in it.”
- “Our Eucharistic pilgrimage is witness to our faith in, and love for, our Eucharistic Jesus.”
- “The Christian life is a pilgrimage with Jesus through time to eternity. He accompanies us in the Holy Eucharist and calls us, ‘Come, follow me!’”

What Should We Be Emphasizing in Interviews?

- “The Eucharistic Pilgrimage is part of the Eucharistic Revival of the Catholic Church in the U.S.A., which dares Catholics to do all they can to grow in Eucharistic gratitude, faith, amazement, love, life and witness.”
- In response to those asking us about the physical rigors and logistical issues, we should acknowledge them but communicate, “These aches and pains are small compared to the joy I have to spend so much time with the Eucharistic Jesus and praying before him for the sake of the revival and for all those we are meeting.”

What Should We Be Emphasizing in Interviews?

- We should be always ready to explain in crisp ways the following:
 - The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist
 - The Miracle of Transubstantiation
 - Eucharistic Adoration
 - The Mass
 - The purpose of a Eucharistic procession or pilgrimage.
- We should also be ready with our own, super-concise story of when we came to faith, or deeper faith, in the immeasurable gift of the Eucharistic Jesus.



Tips for Print Interviews

- If being requested via email, we can always ask for questions and provide email responses or at least think about the questions ahead of time.
- In print, it's possible to be more precise and to edit our responses (immediately) if they don't come out as clearly as we would like.
- It's possible with print media to use "background" and "off the record." *Background* means that the information can be used but you cannot be identified except for "a source familiar with the matter." *Off the record* means the info cannot be used for the story and the source cannot be in any way identified. These would ordinarily be in response to questions that you want to help a friendly reporter understand something important that you don't want to appear at all (off the record) or attributed to you or to any pilgrim. But we're under no obligation to do this for a reporter. Otherwise, we could simply say, "Sorry, that's something I'm not prepared to answer well."



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Tips for Print Interviews

- If the interview is not being recorded, speak slowly to ensure an effective transcription of your thoughts. It's possible for you to record the interview (always inform the reporter that you're doing so, "so that I can listen to my responses later").
- You can ask the reporter to read your quotation back to you if you have a concern as to how it came out or was captured.
- The shorter answers the better, to give them a better chance of being used.



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Tips for Radio and Podcasts

- If you have a difficult name, spell and pronounce it to help the one interviewing you.
- “Set out your stall” — Lay out your argument crisply at the beginning, stressing your 1-3 points.
- Smile, relax, move arms and shoulders to overcome stiffness and nerves.
- If in studio or in person, maintain eye contact with the interviewer and breathe.
- Don’t adopt a “persona,” but be your positive, clear, energetic self!
- Drink water rather than coffee because coffee dries your throat.

Tips for Television

- The same tips as in radio.
- You'll be asked ahead of time for your name and, often, your position ("National Eucharistic Perpetual Pilgrim").
- Feel free to ask about the first question you'll be asked.
- TV is a more superficial medium than radio, with much less time to get your point across and create an impression.
- It's therefore even more important to articulate your position crispy and clearly. You should boil your message down to three points.
- It's more important to connect with people's feelings. "Many are afraid..." "Many are excited..."

Tips for Television

- It's important to look at the presenter all the time. Eye contact is very important because it shows you're a straight-shooter and are trustworthy. At the same time, you're also talking to all those who are watching you.
- Smile when the camera is coming live so that the first impression is someone who is joyful.
- Avoid looking down, closing your eyes, grimacing.
- Men should sit on the tails of their jacket so that it is pulled down and comes off straight on camera. Tall people should have their feet on the ground.
- Be careful about the position and movement of the arms lest you distract.



Tips for Television

- After the interview, wait until they tell you to move. Assume that you are still on camera. Maintain smile, posture and wait to be unhooked.
- Don't make comments while wired up because it's being recorded and can be used.
- In terms of clothing, avoid anything distracting, like garish colors, strong stripes, extreme movements, like manically agreeing.
- Monday to Friday, men should dress formally. On Saturdays and Sundays, men should not wear a tie because it makes them look like they do not have a life.
- For women, have something around your neck, like a scarf or necklace.



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Social Media



- Social media are a great way to allow people to journey with us and share in some of the fruits.
- On the Pilgrimage, you are representing something bigger than yourself. Your “private opinions” could now reflect on the whole Pilgrimage and Revival. Reporters can easily find such comments and make them headlines. The focus should be on the Eucharistic Jesus and the Revival, not on us.
- It would be good to avoid everything controversial in your social media posts and simply to be positive and enthusiastic: “What a beautiful Church we visited today!” “What a thriving parish!” “How great it was to be with the people of Diocese N!” Such a comment with a photo works well.

Questions

