

Baptist World Alliance Communications Seminar

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Responding to crisis

1. Welcome
2. Introduction
3. Presentation
 - a. Principles of crisis management
 - b. Basic steps to creating a crisis management plan
4. Crisis management group exercise/discussion

Crises – a biblical perspective

Crises noted in Paul's letters

1. Crises of schisms, division and disunity
2. Misconduct, private and public
3. Lifestyle choices

Paul's solutions

1. Avoid legal action
2. Christians should suffer wrong for the Gospel's sake
3. Settle the matter internally
4. Put out those who engage in misconduct
5. Accept/receive those who repent

Types of crises

Natural disasters/acts of God

- Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons
- Tsunamis
- Flooding
- Tornados
- Earthquakes
- Famines and droughts

Christian early responders

Early responders are usually, but not always, volunteers who:

- Provide meals and clean water to victims
- Engage in cleanup operations
- Offer counseling

Human-induced crises

- War
- Violence
- Human displacement
- Technological crises caused by human error or failure

Human-induced crises

Confrontation crises

- Demonstrations
- Boycotts
- Picketing
- Sit-ins
- Ultimatums to authority
- Blockade or occupation of buildings
- Resisting or disobeying police

Human-induced crises

Crises of malevolence

- Product tampering
- Kidnapping
- Malicious rumors
- Terrorism
- Espionage

Human-induced Crises

- Scandals
 - Moral
 - Sexually related
 - Financial
 - Disputes and splits
 - Legal
 - Felonies
 - Misdemeanors
- Divisions, schisms, disunity

Guiding principles

- Define what the crisis specifically is or could be
- What type of crisis is possible, even if only remotely possible, that could affect your church or organization?

Guiding principles

- Determine what caused, or could cause the crisis
- Where did it originate, how did it start, when did it start?
- Was it something brewing and was long ignored or did it simply happen out of the blue?

Guiding principles

Determine the possible negative outcome of the crisis, short-term consequences and long-term effects

- Disruption of operations or usual activities
- Extensive and negative media coverage
- Unwelcome public scrutiny
- Negative financial impact
- Adverse legal repercussions
- Administrative and property disputes
- Power struggle
- Compromised leadership
- Loss of leaders
- Loss of faith of members
- Diminished membership

Guiding principles

Prepare a contingency plan. This, ideally, is done ahead of the occurrence of any crisis

Guiding principles

Put a crisis management team in place

- Decide who does what
- Determine who the leaders are
- Decide who are the spokespersons to the media and the public
 - This is usually the leader, whether pastor or CEO, AND the person who has media responsibilities
 - One may, however, bring in someone with the requisite expertise and experience to lead and/or be the spokesperson specifically for the crisis
- Rehearse the crisis plan

Guiding principles

Act with speed

- The first hours after a crisis breaks are the most crucial
- Do not let rumors and speculations by others get ahead of you
- Control the flow of information and the story

Guiding principles

Be accurate

- Ensure the information at hand is correct. No guessing, although one may offer a hypothesis
- Be very clear to state it is a hypothesis; give reasons for the hypothesis

Guiding principles

Be truthful

- Tell the truth, absolutely no fabrication
- Inaccurate or untruthful information tend to backfire and will make the situation worse

Guiding principles

Be available

- Especially to those victimized by the crisis
- To those who make enquiries, such as the news media

Mistakes to avoid

- Playing ostrich – hoping that no one learns about it. Saying nothing and doing nothing
- Starting work on a potential crisis only after it becomes public
- Stating that your reputation will speak for you. At the end of it all, you may have no reputation left
- Treating the media as if they are the enemy
- Being reactive rather than proactive

Mistakes to avoid

- Using language the public does not understand. Most people outside the church do not understand “church-speak,” jargon and technical language such as justification, sanctification, and the like
- Refusing to listen to “stakeholders” – others within the body. Listening only to your own voice

Mistakes to avoid

Assuming that truth will triumph in the public sphere

- Perception tugs stronger than reality
- While telling the truth is indispensable, concrete and bold actions are needed in a crisis situation

Mistakes to avoid

- Refusing to take feelings and emotions into the equation. Anger, fear and other emotions need to be addressed
- Offering only written statements and responses. People tend to want to see a face and hear a voice during a crisis, someone speaking truthfully and empathically

Mistakes to avoid

Guessing what happened or why it happened.
Facts, facts, facts

Creating crisis management plan or guide

Conduct a threat assessment of your church, organization or institution. Normally, threats and crises fall into three broad categories:

- Human error, failure or action
- Technical, mechanical or equipment malfunction or breakdown
- Natural disasters

Creating a crisis management plan

Create a crisis assessment team – heads of divisions/departments/units/experts

This team brainstorms on crises that can occur based on:

- Past experiences of the church or institution
- Evidence of crises in similar organizations elsewhere
- Their own knowledge and experience

Creating a crisis management plan

In the crisis or threat assessment meetings:

- Identify the top 10 crises that are likely to occur
- Whittle the list down to the top five, with number one the most likely of the five and number five the least likely
- A relatively simple way is to divide the meeting into three or four groups. Potential crises identified by more than one group would be the ones likely to make the list

Creating a crisis management plan

Identify the top 10 crises that would be the most devastating to your church or organization, even if they are not likely to happen

- Whittle the list down to the top five
- A relatively simple way to do this is to divide the meeting into three or four groups
- Those potential crises identified by more than one group would be the ones likely to make the list
- Do not worry if there is an overlap with the list above (That, in fact, is not a bad thing)

Creating a crisis management plan

Name all the stakeholders (groups) of the organization. Leave none out.

- A relatively simple way to do this is to divide the meeting into three or four groups
- Stakeholders identified by more than one group would be the ones likely to make the list
- Create a contact list, telephone and email addresses, of stakeholders, especially leaders and opinion shapers

Creating a crisis management plan

Stakeholders normally fall into two categories:

- Internal – staff, volunteers, leaders, members, etc.
- External – community, first responders, law enforcement, media, etc.

Creating a crisis management plan

- Decide on the basic principles to be applied in the event of a crisis. This can be summarized in a statement that is known to the team and can be disseminated to the public.

Creating a crisis management plan

Decide who the spokespersons are in the event of a crisis

- Limit it to one or two persons, usually the head of the church/organization or the person responsible for communications
- These should be the only persons to speak to stakeholders in the event of a crisis
- The virtue of this is to have one, consistent message. The more spokespersons there are the more likelihood of violating this principle

Creating a crisis management plan

Appoint someone, two persons at most, to write the crisis management plan or guide

- You may use some template as a guide
- Assign someone in your organization with the knowledge and expertise or get outside help
- Apply the findings of the assessment team and other important facts and information

Creating a crisis management plan

- Distribute the crisis management plan or guide to the assessment team and get feedback. Make adjustments and changes as necessary. (To save trees, you may distribute by email)
- Create a crisis management team to lead the response in the event of a crisis. Usually, the crisis *management* team is the same as the crisis or threat *assessment* team, but it need not be so
- The team may be changed, or added to, as the need arises

Creating a crisis management plan

- Members of the crisis management team should be fully familiar with the important details of the crisis management plan or guide
- Do crisis management drills or role playing based on the crisis management plan or guide
- As new information becomes available, make changes or adjustments to the plan or guide as needed
- Other changes may include personnel

Proviso

There is more than one approach to creating a crisis management plan or guide

In some instances, an individual is given the task to create a crisis management plan and he or she does so

Proviso

I favor the collaborative approach for the following reasons:

- No one person can come up with all the possible threats that can affect a church or institution.
- Some threats are common but each church or institution is different
- Unique threats can arise. For instance, some churches are located in an earthquake zone while others are in a hurricane or tornado zone. Some are in a farming community, others in the suburbs and still others in urban settings
- The history of each is different and unique

Proviso

- A single person may not be familiar with or sensitive to the needs of all the stakeholders
- A collaborative approach immediately jumps over the hurdle of having to “sell” a crisis management plan to the leaders of internal stakeholders who are likely to play important roles in the event of a crisis

Proviso

- The collaborative assessment approach is at the same time an educative exercise
- Those involved, usually leaders within the church or organization, become more aware of the possible crises that exist and how to deal with them

Proviso

- Crisis management is a team event. No one person can or should manage a crisis
- The collaborative approach to creating a crisis management plan or guide makes this abundantly clear

Exercise/Discussion

A denomination is close to splitting into three factions over doctrinal, administrative and property disputes. Legal actions are threatened. Open altercations occur. Letters to the editor in a leading paper were published about the matter. Reporters are calling the denomination's office with questions.

You are the president of this body. State what action you will take to resolve the problems.

Exercise/Discussion

Short term Christian missionaries visiting from another country irk members of the dominant religion in the host country by openly distributing Christian tracts and engaging in public witnessing. Leaders of the dominant religion accuse local members of the Christian faith, a minority religion, of proselytizing.

Public rage begins to rise and Christians in the host country are threatened with violence.

As the crisis management expert, guide leaders of the Christian community how to avert possible violence.

Exercise/Discussion

The general secretary of a Baptist union receives an email that a vice president who is also the pastor of a large congregation has been involved in an inappropriate relationship with a member of his church office staff.

The relationship, which has been going on for several months, was discovered by the husband of the woman, who is in her thirties with two young children. The husband of the female party is threatening to go public about the affair, and already rumors are swirling.

Work out a plan that should guide the response of the denomination.

Exercise/Discussion

A man walked into a Baptist church during Sunday morning worship and opened fire with a shotgun, hitting the pastor, who was in the process of delivering his sermon.

Two other worshipers were also hit. While most members scampered for safety, three worshipers tackled the gunman to the ground and disarmed him.

Create a scenario of what follows, and how the congregation handles the crisis. What long term changes, if any, will the church make?