

Communicating About the Abuse Scandal: A Very Short Guide

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1) You do not need to be in immediate crisis in order to communicate.

- Priest sexual abuse and those in positions of leadership covering up these incidents represented an institutional crisis for the Catholic Church. All organizations within the institution need to recognize the severity of the situation and the history of incidents. Any organization within the institution could proactively decide that it must respond to maintain its credibility, while also helping repair the reputation of the institution.

2) You must develop corrective action in order to communicate effectively.

- Crisis response is not only about words; it means developing tangible strategies that mitigate the continued occurrence of the event. Jesuit institutions should be able to clearly articulate how they are supporting victims of clergy sexual abuse; how their current policies will safeguard people in the future; and how an honest reckoning with the past is part of local process.

3) You should draw on your mission and values both in developing and communicating a response.

- Jesuit universities have unique skills and resource capabilities that they can implement to help address the clergy abuse scandal. They serve dual missions: they are part of the larger religious institution and also a higher education institution.
- The religious mission means they should particularly focus on victims' concerns and on the impact clergy abuse has on the spiritual and moral well-being of other stakeholders.
- Meanwhile, the higher education mission means they have valuable capabilities of amassing and disseminating knowledge. Jesuit universities can serve a valuable local role by

making knowledgeable faculty and staff available to consult with high schools and elementary schools, where faculty may not have the time or resources to develop as much expertise.

4) You should identify and prioritize stakeholders who need communication.

- Communication with stakeholders is a vital part of a crisis response. Stakeholders might include victims (whether known or unknown), current students, faculty and staff, alumni, the local civic community, the local Jesuit community, the wider community of Jesuit institutions, and more. These groups will need to be prioritized, with those nearer to the center of the crisis first, and may require different forms of communication. To take two extreme examples, direct victims may require a personal liaison to keep them abreast of developments, while the local civic community might be addressed through statements and news articles.

5) You should lead by example in communicating clearly and honestly over time.

- Jesuit educational institutions should be motivated to respond to the priest sexual abuse crisis because of their mission, values, and a sense of responsibility to their stakeholders. They can fulfill their dual missions and lead by continuing to communicate openly as cases unfold and more information emerges. The best response may also be the best fulfillment of mission—that is, to proactively seek out information and address the issue. However, if previously unknown cases emerge through the media or in other ways, developing and implementing a clear timeline for gathering information and sharing a public response is necessary as part of response.

