



## **Crisis Management For Congregations and Ministries**

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### **ACTION STEPS FOR WHEN CRISIS OCCURS**

Here is a basic guideline of what needs to be done the moment you become aware of an internal crisis. The first four steps may occur simultaneously and interchangeably, but all eight steps are important and should be followed:

#### **Step 1 - Gather the facts:**

- Who, what, when, where, why, how?
- Contact information for those involved

#### **Step 2 - Alert and convene crisis management team:**

- Brief the team
- Determine the type of crisis (internal or external) by asking “Who cares?”
- Determine the level of crisis (involves your organization only, involves district or synod, involves local or national community)
- Decide if you need legal counsel, risk management, pastoral counsel, or to alert the authorities or health official, Circuit Visitor, District Facilitator, Vice President, District President
  - **A District Representative should be informed as soon as possible (Circuit Visitor, District Facilitator, Vice President, District President).**
- Identify which target audiences (internal and external) you’ll need to brief
- Determine who should brief which target audiences (i.e., Circuit Visitor, District Facilitator, Vice President, District President, the police, or hospital physicians may brief the media, while you may brief parents, students, employees, and church members)
  - **District may suggest the use of District Reconcilers depending on the circumstances of the crisis.**
- Make a list of what you can and cannot say (i.e., you may release facts but not names)
- Choose a spokesperson appropriate to the level of crisis and the specific situation

### **Step 3 - Draft a statement that includes:**

- The facts and pertinent information
- What you're doing about it
- Incorporate the four crisis message points (see below **Crisis Management Points**)
- Organizational message points that are relevant to the situation
- What the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Michigan District has stated about this type of incident or crisis (i.e., statements on various issues, etc.)
- Identify sources of information (contact person, phone number, website)

### **CRISIS MANAGEMENT POINTS - WHAT TO SAY IMMEDIATELY**

**Express Concern – shock or sadness at the news**

**Assure Cooperation – with authorities and officials**

**Promise Updates – to keep concerned audiences informed**

**Provide Contacts – to direct inquirers to your official spokesperson**

### **CRISIS MANAGEMENT GUIDE**

**Step 4 – Consult with the Michigan District, i.e., the President, Vice President, Circuit Visitor, District Facilitator, legal counsel, and/or the Superintendent of Schools) as needed:**

- Tell them what happened and what you're doing about it
- Share the statement
- Identify the official spokesperson
- Discuss next steps

**Step 5 – Brief your immediate staff and key support people:**

- Tell them what happened and what you're doing about it
- Distribute the official statement
- Identify the official spokesperson
- Ask the staff to support your efforts to end this crisis and review how they should respond to inquiries
- Promise to update them throughout the situation
- Answer questions

### **Step 6 – Release statement to identified target audiences:**

- Answer all inquiries
- Stay on top of the details
- Provide periodic updates

#### The “No Comment” Comment

Saying “no comment” makes you sound like you’re hiding something (AKA, admitting guilt). If you’re not the designated spokesperson for the crisis, it’s best to forward the inquirer with the statement and promise to have someone who is knowledgeable about the situation return their call shortly or before the deadline.

### **Step 7 – Monitor and Manage the Crisis:**

- Provide outlets for people to express grief or respond in positive ways (send cards, hold a prayer service, provide counseling, provide daily briefings)
- Determine when the situation has reached a climax or is essentially over
- Strive to return operations to normal and get employees back to work
- Don’t allow internal individuals to exacerbate the situation
- Communicate with all target audiences regularly
- Keep an activity log (date, who you spoke to, and what was said)

### **Step 8 – Follow Up:**

- Debrief with staff, handle concerns, and thank everyone for working together
- Develop a report/case study and debrief with crisis management team
- Make adjustments to your crisis plan

**Should it be necessary, an Intentional Interim Pastor may be brought in to assist the congregation in healing from the crisis for a specified period of time.**