Unitarian Universalist ministers have a central role in establishing Unitarian Universalism as a respected public voice for liberal religious values. But being a public voice means communicating to a wider audience than those who fill the pews on Sunday, and reaching that wider audience necessarily entails dealing with the media. Knowing that dealing with reporters can cause apprehension, I offer this guidance for successful media relations.

1. Form a Congregational Communications Team:
While the minister is most often the public face of the congregation, you need to exploit the talent in your congregation to support the work of public witness. In smaller congregations, this team might consist of just one or two people who draft press releases, maintain a media contact list, and monitor local media for opportunities for the congregation to speak out. In larger congregations, this team can also produce public witness articles for the congregational website, maintain a list of congregational spokespeople for different issues, and work with other committees to plan and publicize public witness events to which the media is invited.

2. Understand What the Media Looks for
H. Fred Garcia, president of Logos Consulting Group and media consultant to the UUA, has identified the "5 C's" that make up a good news story:

- Conflict
- Contradiction
- Controversy
- Colorful Language
- Cast of Characters

To attract media attention, you will elevate these qualities in your interviews, press releases, and public statements. In the public dialogue increasingly dominated by the voices of religious fundamentalism, Unitarian Universalism offers a counter-voice to this message of divisiveness, and there is abundant opportunity to publicize our positions on such issues as marriage equality, reality-based sexuality education, and separation of church and state.

3. Familiarize Yourself with the Territory
With the assistance of your communications team, develop a list of local media outlets, religion reporters, and types of stories that media outlets produce. What reporter covers the religion beat? Does the local weekly have religion column written by a rotating roster of clergy? Does the local daily have a once-a-week religion section? Does the local cable-access channel have a show devoted to community issues?

4. Develop Relationships
Once you have familiarized yourself with the media terrain, it's time to develop relationships with reporters and editors. Start by introducing yourself and offering to be available to provide a liberal religious perspective on issues the reporter is covering. Or respond to an article by first telling the reporter you appreciate the attention given to the issue and then explaining why you agree or disagree with the opinions expressed by those quoted in the article or the columnist if it's an opinion piece.
5. Communicate Effectively
Your relationship with the media will be nurtured by effective communication. At the
most basic level, this means replying promptly to the reporter with comments that can
be used in the story. Reporters often work on tight deadlines, and they will go back
again and again to people who make their job easier. Pro-active communication entails
sending clear, concise media advisories or press releases to targeted media and then
following-up with a phone call to make sure the item was received.

6. Hone Your Message
No matter how comfortable and conversant you feel with an issue, I strongly encour-
age you to write-down talking points prior to any interview and to have them in front
of you when speaking with the reporter. Ask yourself, what are the three points I most
want to convey about this topic? Then sharpen the expression of those points by re-
membering the “5C’s.” View your interview as a presentation rather than a conversa-
tion: the story can only quote what you say, so only say what you want to appear in
print or on the air. Avoid “committing news” by inadvertently saying something you
will regret. And, except in rare cases, avoid irony and sarcasm because such comments
can easily be misconstrued.

7. Publicize Your Successes
It’s been proven over and over that coverage breeds coverage. An item in a local
weekly leads to a bigger piece in the daily newspaper which leads to a call from the lo-
cal TV station. A sermon sent to the religion editor results in an invitation to write a
guest column on the topic and then a feature article on the social justice work of the
congregation. Keep a clips file of the articles in which you are quoted and the columns
you’ve written and send them to reporters to show that you are a reliable respondent
and an interesting writer.

The staff of the Information and Public Witness office is dedicated to supporting you in
your public witness ministry. By monitoring both hardcopy and electronic news clipp-
ings from across the country, we have a front-row seat on the how our ministers and
congregations are communicating our liberal religious values. We know what works
and we can help you avoid what doesn’t, so please do not hesitate to contact us.

**John Hurley** (617-948-6131; jhurley@uua.org): advice on public witness strategy and
crisis communications

**Janet Hayes** (617-948-4386; jhayes@uua.org) advice on congregational public relations

**UUA Press Room**: media toolkit for reporters, article index, background information,
etc. http://www.uua.org/pressroom/

*NEW*  **Sharing the Good News: A Public Relations Manual for Congregations** by
Janet Hayes www.uua.org/info/prmanual
A comprehensive step-by-step guide to establishing and maintaining a successful pub-
lic relations program in your congregation.