

Guidelines for Spokespersons of the Church of Scotland

The following guidelines (based on the 2006 deliverance of the General Assembly and the 1980 Regulations governing the duties of the Moderator*) are for the use of anyone acting as a spokesperson for the Church.

1. It is part of the responsibility of conveners to speak and make media comment in relation to the work of their department and conveners must be prepared to undertake this task as and when required.
2. In the absence of the convener a vice-convener or other designated person must be available.
3. Contact details of such spokespersons must be available to the Communications Team.
4. The Communications Team will provide opportunities for media training and departments are expected to take up these opportunities.
5. Those who speak for the Church should make clear whether they are (a) stating a position adopted by the General Assembly, (b) stating a position adopted by the relevant council or committee or (c) outlining a policy proposal which is under consideration but has not yet been adopted.
6. It will be a matter of judgement as to whether a particular issue calls for comment by the Moderator rather than a convener. Such a judgement will normally be based on discussions involving the Moderator, the convener(s), the Principal Clerk and the Head of the Communications.
7. While the Moderator is one of those who speaks for the Church it is recognised that the Moderator has a wider, prophetic role which may include articulating a word of challenge to the Church itself.
8. Where an issue arises on which neither the General Assembly nor a council or committee has expressed a view the Moderator is free to express an opinion, though must make clear that he or she is speaking personally as a church leader and not on the basis of a decision of a church body.
9. In times of crisis or celebration it is expected that the Moderator will make appropriate public comment on behalf of the Church.
10. In addition to seeking comment from officials the media may approach other individuals within the Church whom they regard as having relevant knowledge and experience on the matter under consideration. In such cases it is helpful if those approached liaise with the Communications Team.
11. The services of the Communications Team are also available to presbyteries, ministers and congregations who are faced with media enquiries.

The 2006 General Assembly passed the following deliverance:

- a) Instruct the Council (of Assembly) in formulating a communication strategy to prepare guidelines for those who act as spokespersons for the Church, including the Moderator and conveners;

b) affirm that statements and comments should be based on decisions of the General Assembly and, where there is no such decision, on the view of the relevant Assembly council or committee; and

c) further instruct councils and committees to develop strategies for enabling presbyteries to contribute timeously to the development of policy.

* It is also relevant to the note that the Regulations Governing the Duties of the Moderator (Regulations II, 1980) state that the Moderator is to be “mindful of the views of the General Assembly and of its Committees and Departments and, when asked to express an opinion on any matter of national or public importance, so far as possible, to consult with the conveners of such committees and departments but, notwithstanding such consultation to accept instructions only from the General Assembly.”