

“How Bishops and Catholic Media Can Collaborate Better Together”

Catholic Press Association Convention 2011, Pittsburgh

Thursday, June 23, 2011

By Bishop David A. Zubik

As Bishop of Pittsburgh, it is my genuine pleasure to welcome you, members of the Catholic Press Association, to Pittsburgh, our wonderful city and an even more to this wonderful local Church.

If you don't already know it, one of the things that you will quickly learn about Southwestern Pennsylvania is that we are proud of our Sports Teams—the Steelers, Penguins, and even the Pirates—and even more proud of our faith tradition—not only Catholics but all denominations of Christians and non-Christians alike. We take seriously passing on the Good News of our Faith.

And isn't that what this Convention is all about and more importantly what your lives are all about?

It's an honor to welcome you, especially at this time in your history.

Part of our celebration at this media convention is recognizing the 100th anniversary of the Catholic Press Association. With that in mind, I would like to focus my comments on the medium of print.

There has been no greater and more consistent success in Catholic communications in the United States than through the use of print. Just checking the statistics from last year's Catholic Press Directory, Catholic newspapers in the United States and Canada—national and diocesan—

reach nearly 5.5 million households. Catholic magazine circulation is almost 6 million households. Newsletters add almost 1.25 million . Foreign language publications well over 300,000.

Though certainly there is overlap, that comes to over 12.6 million households. That is an extraordinary number and that is still going on today. Right now.

We can and we must use every means of social communications available to us today: television, radio, Twitter, Facebook, Skype and whatever has evolved since you and I began our meeting this morning. But I believe that it is incumbent on us as bishops and on us as Church to maintain a vital Catholic print presence. Twenty years from now, I cannot say if that will continue to be true. But it is absolutely and fundamentally the best tool for us to address our Catholic faithful—and to evangelize the evangelizers—is through Catholic print.

I am definitely and decidedly all for using every means of social communication—the Church must do that. But to abandon print is to abandon what remains our most effective means of communication today. I know that in our diocese, those who read the newspaper are the backbone of the Church—it is read by those most involved, those most dedicated, those quite frankly who supply the financial resources to our parishes, schools and diocese.

Obviously, the critical problem we face is finding the fiscal means to continue print. Many dioceses have great difficulty supporting financially a newspaper. I don't have any simple solutions, but I do have a few practical suggestions:

1. **First of all, the key is circulation.** Bishops need to know the content of their newspaper. But they also must know how the newspaper operates financially.

Bluntly, circulation generates its own revenue and the advertising revenue pays the bills. Ideally, newspapers can exist without subsidies through circulation and advertising revenues but this can only be done through the parishes. We have been able to maintain a high circulation through a parish mandate, operative in the Diocese of Pittsburgh since 1972. The mandate is based on 40 percent of the number of households in each given parish. This has generated in turn enough advertising income that we in Pittsburgh have not had to raise our subscription rates in nearly ten years. The higher the circulation, the more attractive the paper is to advertisers. I know that not all dioceses have our concentrated Catholic population; but all dioceses can provide for advertisers a coveted niche audience and that goes a long way for paying for the newspaper. Build circulation and that is a step well in the direction of financial stability.

2. **The bishop must use the newspaper consistently:** I consider our newspaper as the chief means to communicate with all of the people of the diocese. Again, I will use every social communications tool available. But people know—and I know—that it is through our newspaper that I reach out to them on a regular basis. If they want to know what is going on in the local Church, or what my position is on local issues, they will find that in our weekly newspaper. It is the most effective way for them to encounter my message; it is the most effective way for me to reach out to them.
3. **The bishop must be the most vocal supporter of the diocesan newspaper.** The way we define it here, you are simply out of the loop if you are not reading the

Catholic newspaper. I considerate it my responsibility to make that clear to the priests and faithful of the Diocese.

4. **Integrate the newspaper within the Diocesan structure.** By this I do not mean that the newspaper has to be absorbed within the formal structure of the Diocese. Our newspaper operates as a separate corporation and I insist that its financial operations be completely distinct from diocesan operations and they are. However, the management of the newspaper—specifically the General Manager and/or the Editor—has to be directly involved within the central administration of the diocese to be kept fully abreast on what is going on. Our general manager is a member of our Administrative Board, the Bishop’s Cabinet. A newspaper cannot be in the loop if it is kept outside the loop.
5. **Stay involved directly with the newspaper.** I’m amazed at how many times many bishops rarely see their General Manager or their Editor. I’m also amazed at how many General Managers and Editors at times resist even talking to the bishop. But this is precisely where collaboration is needed. To be able to sit down and talk about issues, even if there is not common agreement. The newspaper must always know what the bishop’s mind is and what he expects, and the General Manager and the Editor must have the regular opportunity to give her or his words to the bishop so that they have common understanding directly.

Okay. I need to learn how to blog, how to Twitter, how to Facebook. That’s something that I must develop if I’m to be an effective shepherd for the Church and beyond. But what I must also do is everything that I can do to make sure that we have a viable, a lively and

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informative Catholic press. Sisters and brothers, a Catholic newspaper today is not a luxury. It is a necessity. And to my mind, at least for the moment, it remains the best vehicle for adult faith formation that we have.