



Managing communications for large Church events

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CASE REPORT



Managing communications for large Church events Best practices for Krakow 2016 and Dublin 2018

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ABSTRACT

Large events present institutions a unique and powerful opportunity to communicate its message. It appears that the Church has recognized this communications tool all through its history, but in a specific way over the last 30 years in which both *World Youth Days* and *World Meetings of Families* began. Given the nature of these events as unequalled communications opportunities, it is of equal importance that organizers of large Church events prioritize the communicative dimension, understanding it as key to the success of the event itself. The scope of this paper is not only to aid organizers in understanding the importance of communications, but also to provide the communication directors of large Church events with some guiding best practices. The authors focus on ten best practices specifically, ordered from strategic to tactical, which are based on official reports and past personal experiences, making the work more practical than theoretical in nature.

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Purpose and methodology

The aim of this paper is to gather some communication experiences from large Church events over the past decade, use them as learning points for future organizers, to help them understand the importance of communications and to act accordingly in assigning resources and personnel; and for their communication directors, in order to anticipate potential challenges and have at hand the cumulative wisdom of those who faced the same dilemmas.

In order to maintain focus, our analysis is limited to two types of Church events: World Youth Day (WYD) and World Meeting of Families (WMF). Nevertheless, we hope these experiences could be applied to the numerous other instances – canonizations and beatifications, papal visits, etc.

Among many aspects to comment on, we selected only 10 for space limitations.¹ After a brief analysis of the history and mission of both large events, the paper will address recommendations starting with the more strategic, such as the importance of

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communications and the key role that content plays in it, and ending with the more tactical, such as the credentialing process and the economic considerations.

Our remarks come from the analysis of some of those events' reports and final recommendations², and from the personal experiences of the authors, who have taken part – in different positions – in various WYDs and WMFs. Therefore, these tips are not theoretical (although they certainly have a scientific foundation), but practical. The real reason to analyze and reflect upon them is not just for scholarly purposes – although they may be helpful tools at teaching courses – but rather practical and useful ones.

Our approach is closer to the case method (studying what happened and why, and deducing guidelines for the future) rather than a speculative analysis. There are very few academic studies in this field. It is not common practice for organizers to dedicate time to reflect on their experiences, disclose relevant data and publish their considerations at the end of a large Church event. For this reason, academics hardly have the prime matter for their research on the topic.³ In this sense, this paper tries to build a bridge between academia and the professional world.

We could describe the following points as life lessons, often learned 'the hard way', namely, making mistakes and suffering the consequences. As the expression goes, these are lessons from the school of 'hard knocks'. We hope that whatever we learned in Toronto, Mexico, Valencia, Cologne, Sydney, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro and Philadelphia could be taken as 'acquired knowledge' for WYD 2016 Krakow and WMF 2018 Dublin, detracting from the pain and uncertainty of making decisions which will have great impact on the entire operation.

As we forge onward, however, we would like for the reader to bear in mind that the following work is not meant to be a critical evaluation of anyone, or any organization, but rather was conceived and crafted with the desire to learn from past mistakes so that they be prevented in the future.

Large events: 30 years of tradition in the Church

From the first Jubilee convoked in the year 1300, to the millions who gathered for Pope Francis' 2015 visit to Manila, large events have a long standing tradition in the history of the Church and remain a meaningful way the Church communicates the faith today. Ceremonies, pilgrimages, canonizations and processions drawing huge crowds have been a constant reality in the life of the Church through the ages. Paraphrasing a famous French philosopher, Etienne Gilson, Christendom was built through events (Gilson 1939, Introduction).

St. John Paul II occupies an important place in this multi-secular tradition. This pope founded both World Youth Days (WYD) and World Meeting of Families (WMF) as new instruments of evangelization oriented to the people of his time. While these undertakings built on the long history of Church events, their organization and implementation is distinctively modern. Then, what may have first appeared to be a tool for a particular pope in a particular time, soon proved to be something much more. A very different pope, such as Benedict XVI, whose character and personality shied away from large crowds, took part in three WYDs and enjoyed them. Even Francis who,

in spite of the fact that as a bishop he never took part in any WYD or WMF, was enthusiastic about WYD in Rio de Janeiro and WMF in Philadelphia.

Now it has been more than 30 years since WYD 1984 ushered in this new era of Church events. Three different Popes have encountered millions of faithful in countries on five continents. While the purpose of these modern events is very much the same as the purpose of those first large Church events over 800 years ago, they represent the birth of a new paradigm in the way the Church spreads the message of the Gospel in the modern world.

The work that large events entail, however, is immense. Organizing one requires huge quantities of resources in terms of time, money and personnel. Those in charge have to work intensely for years, temporarily pull people from other jobs, and spend multimillion budgets. If this is the case, why do they do it?

Profitable investments

Because they are profitable pastoral investments. The Catholic Church promotes large events because the fruits are worth all the effort and pain involved, to renew the pastoral work in a diocese or in a country, acting in concentric circles: first with priests and other pastoral agents, then with the youth and families, and finally with those farther on.

In this sense, organizing such an event should start from the end: what are the goals we want reach post-celebration? This way it is possible to set priorities in advance, and to decide which course of action would bring about the established objectives or, on the contrary, would become a loss of time, resources and focus. It was in this spirit, in fact, that Cardinal George Pell organized WYD 2008 as Archbishop of Sydney: 'I am doing this because I want to multiply by ten the number of youngsters active in parish activities, in Catholic NGOs, in Church life in general' (Pell 2007).

From a communications perspective, events at their very core are a means of communications. An event could be defined as an experiential way of conveying a message for various ends: to strengthen old relationships or to create new ones, to achieve notoriety and public relevance, to promote the values that the organization espouses, or to build up the reputation of the institution. These ends are not mutually exclusive, but rather go hand in hand.

The message at the core of an event can vary. It may be a transcendent one, as at WYD, or merely human, as at the 2012 Olympic Games. Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, explained his reasons for taking up such a challenge, that is, it was an effective tool to obtain his three objectives: to convince Brits of the importance of physical fitness, to improve the country's image and attract tourists, and to reinforce the pride of being a Londoner.⁴ All these objectives fall under the category of communications, and could have been achieved through advertising campaigns or through the media. But they chose an event.

WYD and WMF fit perfectly into this category. John Paul II saw that the youth was no longer being reached by the traditional channels and thus realized the great need to find new ones. The pope never doubted the effectiveness of the message – the Gospel – but he felt it was not being transmitted effectively and therefore 'invented' WYD: a

way to connect with young people using their language.⁵ The same could be said about WMF, though with a different target audience: families.

In order to renew the spiritual life of a community, the Church could prepare a special catechism for youth or for families, a series of TV programs, or even an ad campaign in social networks. Yet, the Church favors these huge international events, convinced that they are worth all the sweat and tears they entail.⁶ Even more, these events are not only worth it for the fruits they may bear, but also are a huge jump in advance in the bearing of those fruits. In soccer terms, it is to pass from a national competition to the Champions League.

The main trait of an event as a communication tool is its experiential nature. Large events mix intellectual and motivational content, personal testimonies, and entertainment. It is not surprising if many organizations use events to explain who they are and what they do, both internally and externally. Communicating through events has come of age, gaining a place among older communication disciplines such as internal communications, media relations and crisis communications.

Also, events allow the use of all kind of channels, and to be truly effective, require their use. For example, audiovisuals, social networks, websites, written materials, ad campaigns in billboards, etc. In this sense, events are the ultimate mix, calling upon all channels of communication to contribute. Due to this capacity to utilize multiple tools of communication, events offer a powerful communications opportunity, but, by the same token, demand greater effort and well-thought-out strategy on the part of the organizers. More on this point later, but for now, let us lay out why we are talking about this in the first place.

WYD and WMF: history in a glimpse

World Youth Day is a religious and cultural event which draws young people from all over the world together for one week every two or three years to learn about Christ's message in a festive and relaxed context.

It is the biggest and most international event that the Catholic Church organizes. The pope, invites the youth, chooses the place and the theme, identifies the event's objectives and presides over the celebration with bishops from all over the world.

Young Catholics – and youth of any faith – are invited to spend a few days in prayer, fellowship and solidarity. These days are especially significant for Catholic youth. The point of WYD is to get to know Christ, deepen one's faith and promote unity with the Pope and the rest of the Church.

The idea of WYD came about during the Holy Year of the Redemption (1983–1984). Its most important celebration for young people took place on April 15 1984. On that day, more than 300,000 young people from many countries (welcomed by about 6,000 Roman families) participated in the International Jubilee for Youth. The following year, on the occasion of the International Year of Youth proclaimed by the United Nations, the Church organized a new event on Palm Sunday and 350,000 young people gathered in St. Peter's Square. After this success, in December of that same year the pope instituted World Youth Day and set the first WYD for March 23 1986 in Rome.

So far World Youth Days have taken place in 1986 in Rome, in 1987 in Buenos Aires, in 1989 in Santiago de Compostela, in 1991 in Czestochowa, in 1993 in Denver, in 1995 in Manila, in 1997 in Paris, in 2000 again in Rome, in 2002 in Toronto, in 2005 in Cologne, in 2008 in Sydney, in 2011 in Madrid, and in 2013 Rio de Janeiro. The next WYD will be in Krakow, July 28–31, 2016.

Similarly, World Meeting of Families is both a religious and cultural global event. It seeks to reach families and renew their understanding of what it means to be one so that they can live it out more fully within their own family and in their culture. St. Pope John Paul II founded it, wanting to strengthen families by addressing the specific cultural, social and religious issues that affected them, and give them the necessary tools to overcome challenges and flourish.

Every three years, the Pope invites families worldwide to come together for a week, to dialogue, to share experiences, and to bond in light of the faith. It is not only a time to evangelize the family, but also, and in that very act, to send them out as subjects of evangelization. The family is a place where one can encounter Christ in a very special and concrete way, due to the unconditional love and selflessness, which should be cultivated within homes. It is also first place where children are educated in their faith, and see how it should be lived out or not. In light of this, it is evident why the Church would greatly prize the role of families in evangelization and want to meet them in a special event, such as at WMF.

WMF, like WYD, takes place in alternating host dioceses. The first WMF took place during the International Year of the Family, 1994, in Rome. The following took place in: 1997 in Rio de Janeiro, 2000 in Rome, 2003 in Manila, 2006 in Valencia, 2009 in Mexico City, 2012 in Milan, and 2015 in Philadelphia – the largest one to date with 20,000 registrants, more than doubling its predecessor. For 2018, WMF will take place in Dublin, Ireland.

Everything is communications

If we are to conceive of an event as a powerful communication tool, communications must play a primary role in the organization and planning of the event. This approach has implications on two levels. First, this means that there is an ongoing effort to meet and listen to your audiences, so as to identify their needs and preferences. Secondly, there must be constant awareness that each decision made regarding the event is ‘transparent’, and clearly consistent with the institution’s identity.

In short, everything should be done in order to communicate the message of the Gospel. From the way participants are welcomed when they arrive, to the way the event asks for public support, to how to react to eventual protesters against a religious event in the streets of their city, that message must be clear.

For this reason, the communications director should never see his role as passing on information from the organization to the public through the media or the website.⁷ Rather he has to make sure that the criteria for successful communication are present in all decision making. To do so, he has to be part of the organizing committee, participate in all meetings with the civil authorities and with the various offices of the Holy See. It is indispensable to have an active interest in everything, and to influence how the event is organized.

We would like to underline his role to ensure the organizational transparency. Nowadays being open to the stakeholders is a *must* for any kind of institution. This is particularly important in large events, for two additional reasons. The first, large gatherings are public interest events, which means that the public thinks they have the right to know, since they happen in their city, use public facilities and affect many citizens who are not going to take part in the event. Secondly, it's impossible to keep a secret in large events, when many people are in the know.⁸

That's why the communications director needs to have authority inside the committee to be able to be proactive, to inform about any aspect of the organization that has consequences to those not attending the event, and to convince others of the importance of transparency.

Clarity in economic matters is the touchstone of transparency. People want to know the sources of income, how the money is spent, and the basic elements of the budget.

A bad example in this issue was WMF 2006 in Valencia.⁹ The whole papal visit was mismanaged by the organizing committee (made of representatives of the local political institutions and the archdiocese), and for years the press brought up controversial reports that there had been corruption during the event. As a result, the public image of the Church was severely damaged and its capacity for organizing a big event was under scrutiny.

The experience of WYD 2011 is two sided. The organizing committee did a good job in showing that the Church knows how to manage an event with professionalism, austerity and clear economic principles, and which contributed to the city's economy. On the other side, Madrid 2011 was not able to be fully transparent in economic terms, and this was a serious problem in the public opinion: many people thought the event received public funding from the State, when in reality the event was fully self-sustained (de la Cierva 2014, 87–92).

The main reason for this false perception was that the committee *did not release the budget figures quickly enough*, and when it did so it was too late; some clichés were already well rooted in the public's perception. The communications department insisted that all financial information be made public from the very beginning, but it did not prevail against the department of finance's prudent policy of only giving definitive information afterwards. The episode shows that full transparency in economic matters is always profitable, and it is better to be fast but incomplete than comprehensive but late.¹⁰

So our recommendation is to be proactive also in informing about finance.

The communication department is also in charge of internal communication within the staff. As WYD 2002 experienced (but not only there), a number of factors including a shortage of staff and money as well as the separation of staff in different buildings become problematic. Given the amount of work involved in a WYD and everyone having so much to do, internal communications ended up being a secondary priority, resulting in difficulties sharing and obtaining information. It is a priority to ensure that information is available as soon as decisions are taken: decisions not communicated are issues not solved.

To be able to do so, the communication director needs to have authority inside the committee. Without it, problems like other departments not sharing documents with

him (in WYD 2008, operation plans; in WYD 2011, finance; in WMF 2015, the Festival of Families script; etc.), will block their responsibilities.

So, authority inside and outside the committee, for instance regarding the calendar. Quite often, the Vatican schedule for announcing the trip and the papal agenda is much slower than what the local organizers need, for institutional relations (agreements with the Head of State household), security reasons (the Police usually requires a long anticipatory preparation), to procure the best venues for events and the media center, and even for TV production. For instance, in WYD 2008, the late finalization of the papal itinerary meant the host broadcast coverage was incomplete, and the local committee could not provide live coverage of most papal, or ancillary, events because of their late confirmation by the Vatican household.

Our recommendation here is to ask to the Vatican officials in charge of papal trips to anticipate their schedules, so both preparations and communications take place according to a fitting local calendar.

Mind your own stakeholders

The first responsibility of the communications department is to identify the main stakeholders and create communications channels with them. This means that it is key to root its preparation to the pastoral structure of the diocese: parishes, religious communities, catholic universities and schools, charities, etc.

This approach has an important consequence for the communication department: internal communications (i.e., communications with priests, the religious and other pastoral agents, with school principals, university boards and with the faithful in general) is one of the main priorities. Communications in the broader sense: not only to transmit messages, but to listen to them, and to mobilize them in the preparation and the implementation of the event.

So, in an event – but this happens in every context – we have to act in circles, starting with those closer to us. We have to ‘preach to the choir’ before going out, because if the choir does not know, agree and beat with the event, how could we reach those far from us in beliefs, values and mentality? Even more, we can reach the whole society not directly but through informed and motivated faithful. They should be the foundation on which your communication is built, they will protect your event as it is in progress and, perhaps most importantly, they will be the ones left behind to carry on the legacy of the event when it has been completed.

Establishing channels for communication with those primary stakeholders is vital to the full mission of the event. The more effective channels are direct channels, because we control both the flow and the content (de la Cierva 2014, 293–294). Mediate channels – the press – are less effective, since someone else controls the flow (the media decide if the information is relevant or not) and the content (if they disagree with the information, they will report against it).

An example of the consequences of not having direct channels with your primary stakeholders happened in WMF 2015. The organizing committee’s primary channel for communication with event attendees was the local media. But the reliance on press releases and press conferences became a liability when the coverage turned negative and began to focus on logistical concerns.

In this situation, the communities which would have been likely to support the organization were connected to the event mainly by the press, and the internal channels with parishes, etc., were not reinforced. When media controversies arose about security and transportation, there was no fast and effective way to directly communicate (transmit and listen to) with the parishes and other Catholic communities, and make some important clarifications about the logistics of the event. Even more, the leaders of these communities were among those calling into the phone bank to ask questions and voice concerns.

For instance, a few days before of the Festival of Families (one of the main papal events during WMF), it had become clear that the crowd would be significantly smaller than expected, as a result of negative media coverage of transportation and security concerns. But at that time, there was no way to mobilize communities to help promote attendance, since the media were carrying the opposite message of fear and distress.

Finally, the stakeholders you establish in the very first days of event planning will be the leaders and communicator remaining in a community long after an event is over. If, in the end, they are unable to identify the reason for the event and its message, and if they are not able to articulate that and share it with others when the event is over, then the effectiveness of your event ends with the last item on the program. In that case, the lack of community empowerment has made it impossible to create a legacy.

Content is king

At the core of communication is the mission to elaborate content according to the guidelines of the diocese and the Pontifical Council in question for each event. Content should stem directly from the global strategy, as a specific implementation of the communications plan (La and José 2009, 95–122 & Carroggio, Mastroianni, Gagliardi 2012, 125–136).

The previous affirmation seems almost self-evident in general and even more so for the Church. Most ecclesial institutions prefer to elaborate their own communication materials, for three reasons:

- i. Communicating the Church requires a lot of specific knowledge, because of its rich and unique personality;
- ii. Making public any kind of official information is considered something quite delicate, which means the top management (Vatican dicasteries, bishops, superior generals, general secretaries of bishop conferences, etc.) revise them quite attentively and even prefer to write them personally;
- iii. Last, for budget reasons: most communication departments in Church institutions suffer constant economic restraints, and preparing content internally is much cheaper than asking someone else to do it on a professional basis.

Nevertheless, the organization of a large event absorbs a huge amount of people and energy, and the volume and time-sensitivity of the materials that the organizers have to provide to their stakeholders is colossal. For those reasons, some organizing committees are tempted to see content related duties such as writing articles as a heavy

burden, and they choose to outsource them. That was the decision made by both WYD 2013 and WMF 2015, in which the organizing committees hired an external PR agency to prepare content.¹¹

In both cases, the experience was problematic, for several reasons:

- The natural tendency of a PR firm is to work as they are used to (i.e., as for a commercial or political institution) which means they focus their task mainly on informing about the organizational aspects of the event: number of people attending, security issues, sponsors and partners, etc. Those elements are certainly important, but they miss the most relevant aspect of a Church event: using communications to link people with the diocese and with the rest of the Church, and to spread a religious message. It seems quite difficult, if not impossible, that a business-minded communications model convey the pastoral point of view.
- When an external firm is in charge of media relations, the organizing committee is not in full control of the media coverage: other people, who are not necessary in line with the real event priorities, call the shots. For instance, a PR firm will always pay more attention to a secular media outlets than to a Catholic TV network or newspaper, while for a Church event, the latter would be a better channel to reach the event's priority stakeholders.
- External agencies are not always trustworthy in moments of crisis or when encountering serious problems. In those circumstances, they lack two indispensable elements to handle a crisis: the full internal trust (Church authorities do not usually open themselves to external people when something bad has happened); and full alignment with Church's mission and vision. In crisis, identity is always more important than popularity, which is not the normal practice in business-minded communications. This is the case, for instance, when a controversy hits the hosting diocese during the years of preparation. An external adviser will suggest not to get in trouble for the sake of good press, while an internal communicator will seek to defend Catholic identity and its consequences even if they are not popular (de la Cierva 2014, 107 & Carroggio, Mastroianni, Gagliardi 2012, 150–151).

This became an issue at several points during the preparations for WMF 2015, particularly with issues related to homosexuality. In the weeks leading up to WMF 2015, a private, independent Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia fired a director of religious education on the grounds that she was openly living in a homosexual relationship with a woman and had obtained a civil marriage. If this situation were only considered from a PR perspective, a solid case could be made that the best decision would be for the archbishop and the archdiocese to keep a distance from this situation. They argued it was not an archdiocesan school or an archdiocesan decision and so there was no need to address the issue head on.

In fact, there was little that the Archbishop of Philadelphia could have gained from speaking about the described situation. Public sentiment was in favor of the teacher. The narrative was already in place that a 'liberal' Pope was at odds with the 'conservative' Archbishop and a timely, controversial story to feed that narrative would be a distraction from the mission of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in its preparations for WMF. Yet, the Archbishop rightly assessed that, while speaking on this topic would

put him at risk of a wave of negative press, it would be a much greater risk to jeopardize clarity on the message and teachings of the Church by remaining silent. He insisted: for him it was more important to show support for the school who had made a difficult decision to live up to the teachings of the Gospel than to hide from making a tough stance for the sake of popularity¹².

Good press is not the end in itself, and there are times when clarity and support of the message of the Gospel will necessitate an unpopular decision or stance. It is precisely in those moments when it is most important that content is driven from the heart of an event and not from the outside.

Another episode from WMF 2015 Congress is worth mentioning. One among more than 100 speakers would address same-sex attraction. Nevertheless, the Church's teaching on homosexuality had, predictably, become a point of media focus and the story of the fired teacher had only fueled criticism. In order to avoid problems, the external PR firm planned media availability of speakers in such a way that he would be lost in the crowd. Their point was that by making him particularly available to the media, the event organizers would be elevating his topic above the others. Others disagreed because if they appeared to be hiding the speaker, that they would create a larger problem.

The real issue, however, was another one: should the Church publicly explain her position on the matter, or not? A seasoned, eloquent speaker who could articulate the Church's teaching should have been viewed as a tool to further spread the message of the event. Instead, the communications team and the outside firm found themselves disagreeing on the best way to hide him. Which was, in our opinion, a pity. The Church would hardly find a better opportunity to explain her position: the context was right, the environment was favorable, and those listening – experts in family issues from 103 countries – would have multiplied the message when they would go back home.

So, our recommendation is to have a clear outsourcing policy: keep communication strategy and content production inside the Church, while whatever is not related to content can and sometimes should be delegated.¹³

A good experience from WYD 2011 was to create inside the communication department a section exclusively in charge of content with authority over the other sections, because its mission was to translate the strategy into stories. The mission of this section – the 'storyteller' section – was to generate newsworthy stories for the four WYD platforms – the web, social networks, media and advertising. In addition, it provided guidelines for audiovisual production, for the relationships with sponsors and benefactors, and for the training of volunteers.

The demand for content is, at the end of the preparation, huge: any event organizer will receive hundreds of last-minute requests: interviews with the cardinal or archbishop, articles, etc. To overcome the difficulty of finding someone with the preparation, experience and skills to guide this section, organizing committees could ask the help of Catholic institutions, borrowing seasoned communicators for the last months of preparation.¹⁴

One particularly effective entity in this regard is *Catholic Voices*. It is a program that has established itself as a valuable tool in many Church communication situations, and large events are no exception. Established in the UK during the preparations for

Pope Benedict XVI's visit in 2010, *Catholic Voices* provides training oriented toward a better understanding not only of the Church and her teachings, but also of the common misperceptions that surround it. The scope of this training is to be able to communicate effectively the nature and teachings of the Church to current society. Their formation produces knowledgeable and articulate speakers and interviewees who can competently interact with media while even addresses some of the most controversial issues facing the Church. This program serves to prepare existing staff and volunteers for media questions and, if offered to the larger community, creates a larger pool of people to offer the media.

Our recommendation here would be to do something similar to what WMF Philadelphia did: namely, offer an experts row desk directly in the media center which will be entrusted to seasoned speakers, such as members from *Catholic Voices*. Those speakers should be pulled from all pertinent areas of interest that touch upon the event, civil as well as ecclesial authorities, and ready at hand to speak to journalists regarding their area of expertise.

Regarding media coverage, local organizing committees should take into account that neither of the pontifical councils charged with these events will give them guidelines for this important task; and the few orientations they will receive from Secretariat of State really regard only the event as a papal ceremony. But WYD and WMF are much larger events than a papal visit: youth and family attendants are not spectators but true protagonists, and they shape many activities: catechesis with bishops, cultural program, vocational fair, etc. Accordingly, WYD 2002 Toronto communications director suggests not to forget that reality, and to put them at the core of the communication efforts, from the very beginning to the post-event video.

Prepare journalists to cover your event: shaping your own narrative

In the previous tips, we underlined the importance of content. Content, in a Church event, is related more to the faith than to the logistic aspects. It is the Catholic faith that explains why big crowds create a warm, friendly and happy Christian environment with people who have never met before. People behave as brothers and sisters without even sharing a language or a culture. Of course, numbers (participants, countries, meals, jumbotrons, etc.) are interesting, but should not occupy the center of attention. As we already said, the Church organizes those events to convey a religious message, which should be at the center of the communication efforts.

If this is the case for every stakeholder, it is even more important for media. Large Church events coverage is not in the hands of reporters specialized in religious events. Even more, most of the secular media do not have journalist experts in covering religion. So it is often the case that outlets send any kind of journalist available those days to cover a large event.

For this reason, it is quite important to help reporters understand the key elements of the religious aspects of the event. WMF 2015 was a model example of this: with the collaboration of the Religion Newswriters Association, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross organized a two-day seminar in that city, in which several hundred reporters (including some from the most influential papers in the U.S., such as the New York Times and the Washington Post) had a unique opportunity to learn about

Pope Francis and his pastoral priorities, to have direct access to key persons in the papal trip (Archbishop Chaput, the apostolic nuncio, the president of the bishops conference, Vatican officials travelling with the Pope, a couple of biographers, etc.) and a survey about Catholicism in America (Lipka 2015).

Our recommendation is to repeat this kind of initiative a few months before WYD and WMF in the same city where the event will take place. The seminar should have the draw of newsworthy speakers and should be planned with possible challenges to address.

This could represent an opportunity for event organizers to be proactive in the framing of the event, rather than wait passively to be the object of the story. A few elements could give away interesting information: What patterns do the media questions and coverage reveal? Are they focused on ‘uninspired’ facts (attendance numbers, budget and logistical factoids)? In that case, organizers can offer new story lines and perspectives. Are they negative or misinformed? Identify the where the focus has split from the message and present the media with compelling speakers which challenge their narrative. Be aware that not all unsubstantiated negative coverage is ideologically driven or malicious, and therefore not as difficult to overcome as it may seem at first. In some cases, it is simply easier for a journalist to build on the narrative that already exists than it is to reinvent one. And, again, many journalists called on to cover these events are not experienced religion reporters, making them even less likely to have the background necessary to understand the basics of the Church. Especially in these instances, a seminar can be mutually beneficial to the event organizers and to the journalists.

In the case of Philadelphia, there was a narrative of Pope Francis as a rogue liberal, prepared to break ranks with the Church on controversial issues; and that the Catholic Church in the US was much more active in pro-life controversies than in fighting poverty and promoting social integration. The speakers at the conference in Philadelphia were selected with this problem in mind and came armed with ideas, facts and figures to dismantle that misunderstanding. At the end, everybody was happy: relevant speakers presented the message in a clear and effective way, and the media found useful materials for their near future.

One head, one team, one internal tool

In a large event, organizers use many communication channels. Even more, it could be said that events could and should use all communication channels and tools available. But the more channels used, the bigger the need of ensuring the unity and coherence in messaging. This is always true: communications is an integrated phenomenon, whose origin is the institution’s identity and strategy.

Certainly, channels impose some conditions. Each channel has its own language and its own favorite kind of content. Video, for instance, conveys more emotions than an article; an article is a better channel for ideas and stories; and a graphic shows facts and figures in a more effective way. Which means, those in charge of each channel need to have autonomy to adapt the stories that convey the message (prepared by the content section) to the characteristics of the channel, keeping in mind that adaptation

does not mean essential changes. Content section is the strategy gatekeeper, and exercises supervision over all channels.

This need of consistency and coherence is especially relevant in a large event, because the amount of information is huge. We are talking about thousands of tweets and posts, hundreds of press releases and news stories for the website, frequent press conferences, etc.

Which means that, at the end of the day, there should be only one communications director, and everybody working in communications has to report to him/her. (This was the model for WYD Madrid, 2011. See [Figure 1](#)).

Unfortunately, this does not always happen. In WMF 2015, for instance, there were three different heads of communication: World Meeting of Families communications director, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia communications director, and the director of the external PR agency in charge of the papal trip. And each one of them had his or her own team, with their own hierarchy, working method and culture. And because WMF happened in the context of a papal visit to a country, the Bishops conference's communication department had too a slice of the pie.

Our first recommendation here is to make an extra effort to ensure there is one head of all of them, and that the people which each one of them brings on are integrated in the same team. One boss, one team, one set of objectives. Otherwise, several teams could reach logistical agreements (you take care of this, I take care of that), but this system does not work because it make impossible to agree in the most important thing: the strategy.

Consequently, our second recommendation is one strategy for all channels. If each channel has different strategies because it is supervised by a different team (in WMF 2015, media relations and public affairs were entrusted to the PR firm, while the website and social media corresponded to WMF team), the event's stakeholders receive conflicting info.

One boss, one strategy and one team require mechanisms to guarantee that all have access to the same information. Unfortunately, the lack of information inside the communication team has been a universal problem. No previous WMF or WYD's organizing committees so far have been able to create a system that allows all communications personnel to have access to all the data needed before and during the event.

The reason for that is threefold. First, directors tend to keep relevant information for themselves until the last moment, both because information is power and for the risk of leaks, and when it's about time to tell all their team members, it's too late: they are so incredibly busy that they have no time to stop and tell people what they need to know and to answer their questions.

Second, during the operations, it's quite frequent that everybody is busy fixing urgent problems, so nobody is acting as the communication hub, coordinating the operations and making last minute decisions available to everybody. So, changes to the plans are not known by the vast majority of the team.

Third, because communications technologies face serious problems during large events: networks become overwhelmed by numbers, cellphones get blocked by inhibitors, there is no time to read emails, etc.

Our third recommendation is to create an app for communication staff, with all the data related to the event, so everybody has in his or her pocket all info regarding

Departamento de comunicación

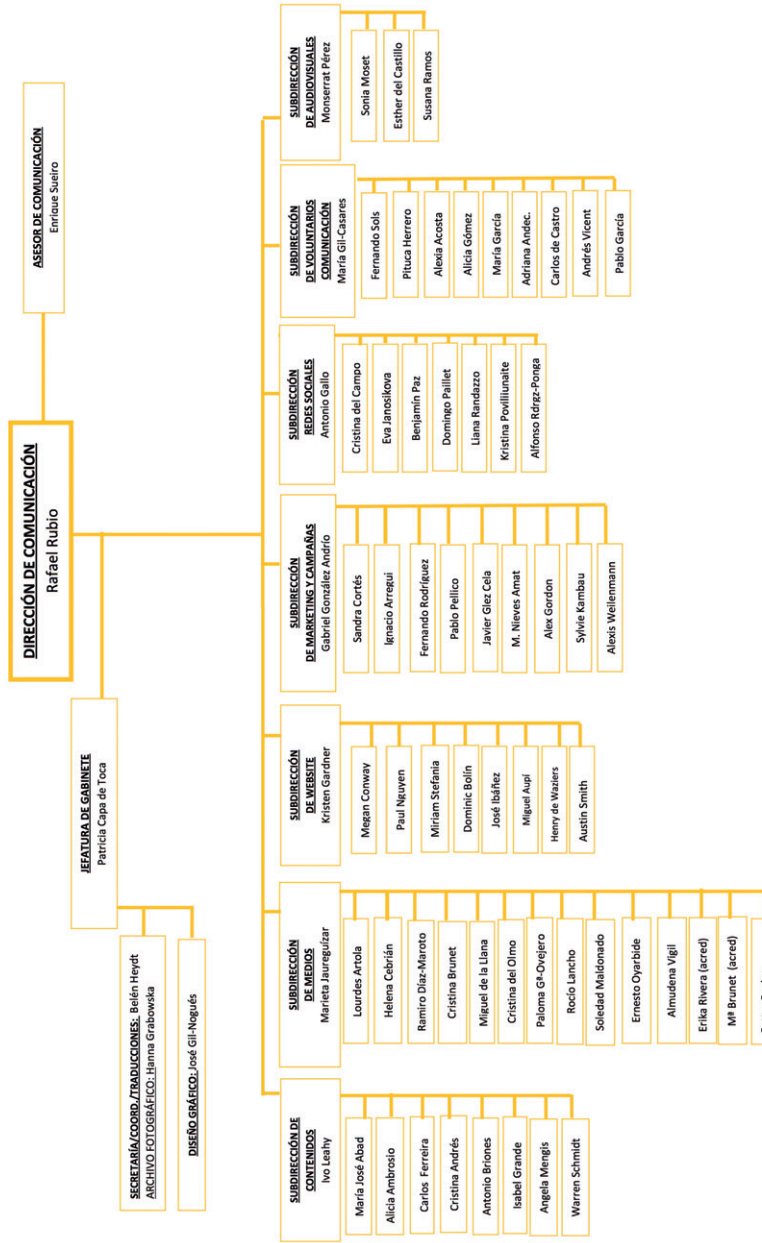


Figure 1. *World Youth Day Madrid 2011* communication department was organized in such a way that all reverted back to one head, and thus one concentrated strategy was behind it all (see organization chart above). Even though there were many channels of communication (e.g. website, social media, audiovisuals, marketing campaigns etc.) this set up favored more readily an effective transmission of one cohesive message as it was stemming from the same source, and being communicated by the same team.

content (press releases, Q&A, etc.) and logistics: media positions, transportation schedule, credentialing database, etc. The app ensures that the info is well structured and updated as, whenever the phone is connected, it automatically downloads all the documents' latest version.

Together with the app is the need to appoint someone responsible for updating those documents, with all modifications made by the authorities.

Don't be shy, ask for help

As the day of the event nears, there will be need for countless hands-on assistance. Your volunteer coordinator will have to assign volunteers to positions, to accompany reporters in the buses to and from the venues, to accompany a journalist to meet a talent for an interview, prepare content, etc. The good news here is that, for papal events like WMF and WYD, many people are willing to help.¹⁵

The strategy in WMF 2015 was especially effective. First, the communications team recruited communication professionals from around the Philadelphia area. These included journalism professors, PR consultants and communications directors at non-profits. They received some training in the logistics and messaging of the event. Then they were on the ground as the event was being covered to help manage the crowd of journalists professionally.

There are several advantages to using a separate pool of media professionals as media volunteers rather than pulling individuals from the general pool of volunteers. First, they have a sense for what the reporters need or could use and this improves media relations. Second, they are already connected to media communities so they act as a natural bridge between the media and the event. Third, they can help tap into other communities to connect more people to the event. Journalism professors can involve their students, non-profits can inform their employees, and those working in tourism or a local chamber of commerce can involve parts of the local community not yet reached.

Our recommendation is to build upon what Philadelphia established as an example of media volunteers. Providing additional training about messaging and content will truly allow these volunteers to become media ambassadors and would encourage more and better coverage of the event.

Think outside the box: from national to international

One thing that often gets overlooked by the local committee is international media, a very important group to cater to, even in numerical terms.¹⁶ This is completely understandable due to various factors, such as lack of time and resources to effectively reach them, lack of knowledge about issues in those countries, etc., and of course, if you make a mistake, maybe you will not notice; but someone else in the Catholic Church will suffer the consequences. Despite the presence in the event of participants from many countries, that will surely tell their experiences to many people back home, it will be the reporters' stories and experience that counts towards shaping the international narrative abroad.

This international character is at the core of WYD and WMF. Nevertheless, their local organizing committees and their communication departments usually put reaching international audiences on the back burner: it is already so complicated to handle local media that thinking of the international media is beyond their possibilities. Besides, neither of the pontifical councils in charge of those events stress this element.

One way to handle this is to reach out Catholic institutions with worldwide activities (CCEE, CELAM, religious congregations, apostolic movements, etc.) and to bring their communication departments in. An example of this could be the three brainstorming meetings organized by WYD 2011 in Rome, with more than 30 Church communication professionals, to keep them informed, get ideas from them and to ask for their help in dealing with international media. The more people consider the event “theirs”, the more collaboration they will provide.

Another way is to establish an in-house team dedicated solely to international media (on WYD 2011’s senior team: de la Cierva 2014, 61). To be a truly effective team, however, it must be international itself which requires looking beyond one’s own borders for help. By doing so, you will have acquired a team not only able to communicate with international media, and thus greatly reduce frustration, loss of time and energy on simple language barriers, but also a team who understands the cultural dynamics and pressing issues present in other parts of the world regarding the Church. In one word: culture counts more than language.

This initiative started in WYD 2011¹⁷, and worked in WYD 2013¹⁸ and in WMF 2015.¹⁹ In Philadelphia, for two months a team of two handled the international media until the week of the event. The primary goal for this team was to communicate the message of the event to non-English speakers and non-Americans. Two primary focuses for this group were to act as advocate and aid to the international media whenever possible and to develop social media communities about the event in other languages.

For the week prior, and the week of the event itself, the team increased to six, comprised of members from five countries.

While the team accommodated international media in any way needed, from logistical to cultural questions, their primary scope was to supply media with content and help shape the international narrative. One concrete way of doing so was getting media in touch with voices and stories that would interest international audiences. Voices ranged from clergy, WMF congress speakers and experts on family issues, but most importantly, families themselves, the center of the event.

Our recommendation for creating a more international mindset is to bring in an international team earlier in the game (at least working from home as an advisory online team for the last two months), and expand your international pool by drawing in a bigger team. There are two reasons for this. First, for preparation and planning purposes, it is useful to have advocates on site for the international media, as well as communicating with them in the initial stages. And second, for the team members themselves, an earlier start will improve their effectiveness in aiding international media during the event. Arriving the week prior, leaves little time for the international team to understand the inner workings of the system, communications strategies, logistics and layout, and make contacts to offer the media.

Investing in media coverage, is it worth it?

All large events have to face the same question: how much should we invest in media coverage? The list of expenses in a WYD or a WMF is long and overwhelming, resulting in a pressure to cut as many voices as possible, and to reduce the others as much as possible. So, there will inevitably be members of the local organizing committee asking whether we could avoid spending money on communications and media coverage.²⁰

It is very true that the main chapter of the communication budget should be personnel. Ultimately, however, any large church event needs to spend money on the media center, the risers at the event's venues and in the TV feed. Do journalists deserve it? Let us analyze each one of them.

The media center is a key element for any large event: that is where most of the journalists spend the most time during the event. The organizing committee has to provide a place big enough and with the required technical facilities (screens to watch the live feed, broadband Wi-Fi to send video and high-resolution pictures, etc.) to allow reporters to work. Yes, this is a big investment, but worth it. A happy journalist reports much better than an angry one.²¹

In this aspect, being economically prudent signifies adjusting its size to the real needs. To guess correctly on this matter, our recommendation is to prepare working places (desk, chair, plugs, audio and TV feed, etc.) for 25%-33% of the credentialed reporters, leaving out of the count all the other media workers (videographers, producers, TV and radio technical personnel, etc.), which are more than half the total amount of credentialed media, because their jobs do not require them to work inside the media center.

Regarding the venues, the organizers have to provide special places designed for journalists to cover the events. At large events, there should be risers, both for written media reporters and for TV cameras and photographers. At small events (the Pope's visit to the head of state that normally happens in any papal trip, for instance), on the other hand, there should be some reserved places for a reduced pool.

There are two ways of saving money here: making small risers and charging for positions. The former is always a temptation: there is always pressure not only to spend less money, but also, and more so, to find good spots for bishops, authorities, special guests, etc. If you consider, however, how many people will follow the event through TV, radio and the web, you will understand how important it is not to reduce the media risers. The suggestion here would be to change mentality and thus strategy: do not consider journalists as VIPs, putting them only close to the stage, but rather situate them in a place they can see both the stage and the masses, which are the center of the event.

The other way of saving money is charging the media the sum of what those risers cost the organization to create, which is a common policy for entertainment events (sports, music, etc.). This was the strategy of WMF 2015 where reporters covered the building expenses of the risers.²²

Our recommendation is not to charge the media anything for the coverage. Charging money to be present in the events is shooting yourself in the foot. An event is organized for the sake of transmitting a message, so it seems

counterproductive to put an obstacle of any sort, economic or other, in the way of reporters covering it.

This strategy also has negative consequences because the first media to go, because they cannot pay those expenses, are Catholic media (their economic constraints are huge) and the bloggers. This latter group, Catholic or not, sometimes have many more followers than even many national papers.

Finally, the TV signal. It is compulsory that the organizers provide a TV feed to all networks interested in broadcasting the event live, or to provide them with footage for their newscasts. There are three ways of doing that:

- a. Ask a big TV network (normally the public channel) to be the official TV provider. This system works very well in countries in which the public network is in a prominent position; Catholics are the majority of the population in that country; or when the papal visit is considered an official state visit and this service is a government contribution. This was the case in WYD 2000 (Radiotelevisione Italiana, RAI) and 2013 (O Globo). The advantages are: there are no expenses for the organizing committee, and it saves time since the whole technical operation (connecting feed producers with those who want it) goes through professional channels.
- b. The organizers hire a TV production company and ask them to do it and pass the feed to anybody who is interested, free or paying a fee. This was the system in WYD 2008, because that was the only available solution (no network was interested in ensuring the feed of all papal events in Sydney), and in WMF 2015. To save money in Philadelphia: those outlets who wanted the feed paid for it and so covered the expenses. Another advantage of this system is that the organizers control every element of the TV feed.
- c. Creating a sort of a joint venture of networks that distribute among themselves all events and then provide the feed to the rest. This system has the advantages of the first model, and can also be used where public networks cannot make the full coverage for economic or political reasons. It was used in WYD 2011 (with RTVE, TM and Channel 13) (de la Cierva 2014, 165), which took the idea from the papal visit to the UK in 2010 (with BBC, ITV and Sky).

Whatever the system, and in agreement with our previous recommendation, we strongly suggest to invest money in making the TV feed available as much as possible.²³ The images of the pope with large crowds of young people or families convey an important message: Christian faith and values are relevant in this secularized world, and believers do not hide in dark churches but meet in the open to defend their proposal in a peaceful and joyful way.

Media operations could and should be outsourced

To non-professional eyes, anything related to the media falls in the realm of communications. This could be true in ordinary communications, but it is only partially true in events, and completely wrong in large events. The larger the event is, the more

autonomy the technical aspects of media coverage have from communications; this is for the sake of the communications department.

In a large event, it is very important to separate communication from media operations. Communication is in charge of whatever is told to participants and other stakeholders (authorities, sponsors, neighbors, the general public, and the media) through the website, social media channels, press conferences and releases, etc. Instead, media operations is in charge of the technical aspects of communications: the facilities and functioning of the media center, the risers and pools in every event and how to reach them, the TV feed and the audiovisual services to be provided to radio and TV networks, and the media credentials. All those aspects require a specific mindset, closer to logistics than to communications, and different skills. Organizing the media coverage consists of facilitating the media to do their job in non-ideological terms: to ensure cameras can see the altar from their positions, the different crews have access to the venues, and so on and so forth. In fact, normally the media representatives in charge of these issues are not journalists but producers, videographers, and video and audio technicians because it has (almost) nothing to do with content.

Thus, for their own good, communication personnel have to be “protected” from these tasks. They cannot add value to this and the number of hours that (usually last-minute) needs require can endanger the most important thing they can do: maintain meaningful relations with journalists and provide them with content, not credentials or positions in risers. It would be a pity if communication managers are kept quite busy fixing credentialing problems and spending sleepless nights, precisely when content is more important: writing articles and interviews, providing stories to journalists, coping with a rumor or an attack, etc.²⁴

Our recommendations here are threefold. In the first place, the key media operations aspects (what kind of media center, risers, TV signal, etc.) are strategic decisions, so they correspond to the organizing committee through its communication department.

Second, to create a media operations department, in charge of all those technical aspects of media coverage. For its nature, the job could and should be outsourced: entrusted to professionals with experience in large events, which normally are technical people, not communicators (de la Cierva 2014, 163–167). A good example of where this took place was *WMF Philadelphia, 2015*, as the Media Center was strategically outsourced (see [Figure 2](#)). In reality, the media center of a papal visit is quite similar in its facilities and equipment than the media center for a political convention or an international summit. The differences are only in content.

The third recommendation regards its supervision. Media operation managers should know and accept in advance that all aspects that imply decisions on content should be consulted to the communications department. For instance, the process of credentialing fully falls among the competences of media operations; but the selection of pools with special access to some venues are linked to the media strategy (who is more relevant because his coverage reaches a priority stakeholder), and is a communication decision (unless the selection is decided randomly or by the media, choosing their own representatives).

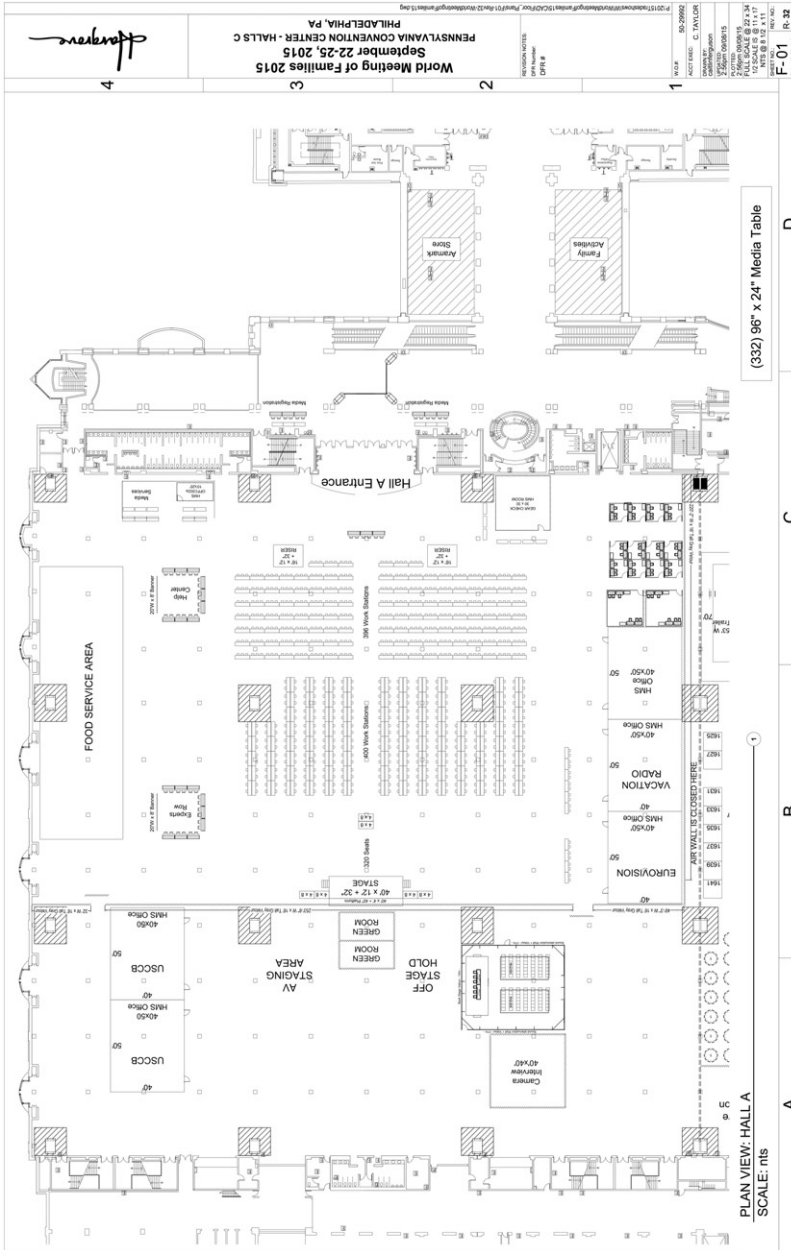


Figure 2. *World Meeting of Families Philadelphia, 2015*, had its Media Center located in the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia's historic downtown, providing ample space for the incoming media: 769 working spaces for the journalists (see center, column A & B), 3 stations for radio networks (see bottom center, column A & B), stage for press conferences (see left center, column B), an off stage hold (see right, column A) etc. WMF 2015 correctly outsourced all media operations in terms of logistical and technical aspects to a local media production company called Harbinger. This decision freed the communications department to focus on content.

Credentialing: keeping it simple

Credentials are a necessary part of any event for security reasons. Media representatives usually have access to hot areas and special equipment or services (Wi-Fi or full texts, for instance), so organizers should ensure that the requests come from people working for legitimate media outlets.

In case of large events, with the participation of religious or civil authorities, the national police usually demand that all credential requests go through a security check, that the documents are made to be hard to falsify, and are distributed on a personal basis.

The need of simplicity in this process is due to three factors:

- a. First, the event organizers are not in full control of it, since the police will impose certain conditions that could go against the interests of the event. For instance, organizers are interested in widening the coverage as much as possible, while the authorities tend to impose short deadlines for security reasons; and this is bad because many journalists, even from important outlets, will request last-minute credentials. The simpler the process is, the easier it will be to fill those requests.
- b. Second, large Church events like WMF or WYD could attract thousands of journalists: 4,950 in Madrid 2011, almost 6,000 in Rio de Janeiro 2013, and more than 8,000 for the papal trip to the U.S. in 2015. If the process is not simple, the amount of follow-up inquiries can take thousands of hours from those in charge of the process.
- c. Third, large Church events are quite international gatherings, where language barriers could be a problem. So the clearer the system is (in the process as well as in the written style), the fewer additional requests there will be.

Here some recommendations which originated in the experiences of the last WYD and WMF:

- It is very convenient to work with a company with expertise in credentials for international events and which also has good relations with the police. This way, police will trust how the database is protected, and the relationship will be smooth;
- It is important to collect all the information directly from reporters through an online portal, programmed in such a way that controls automatically that all information is correct, sends confirmation messages and information, etc. Make the software work for you.
- Start confirming credentials as soon as possible, even before the end of the deadline. Otherwise, very conscientious journalists (or people coming from far away, that need to buy air tickets early) will start soon asking whether their requests have been granted, and this correspondence (in several languages, by the way) is an extra step that could and should be avoided.
- Although credentials are linked to positions, do not mix both processes. Sometimes positions have to be decided late or undergo changes for logistical reasons. If credentials have to wait until it is safe to communicate positions, you would make the wait too long for too many.

- Besides the credentials, it is necessary to prepare underlays: documents that give access to positions or pools. It is much more convenient that underlays have no names on it, to be distributed according to immediate needs with great flexibility. Each part of the event has its own color of underlay, so checking access is easier.

Final recommendations

At the beginning of this paper it was mentioned that these ten recommendations specifically have WYD 2016 Krakow and WMF 2018 Dublin in mind. Nevertheless, we hope that they may be useful not only to their local hosts, but also to the Holy See.

In fact, the local organizing committees do not have full responsibility for communications, as they do not have full responsibility for the events themselves. Like any other papal events, both WYD and WMF depend mainly on the Vatican. Surprisingly enough, the dicasteries responsible for each, the Pontifical Council for the Laity regarding World Youth Day, and the Pontifical Council for the Family regarding World Meeting of Families, usually focus more on organizational aspects (pastoral plan, distribution of people on the stage, registration, hotels for bishops, etc.). They very rarely, on the other hand, study and consider the communication plan and its consequent development.

In reality, it is the Vatican Secretariat of State who coordinates media center issues, concerned with journalists traveling alongside the Pope (the so-called Vatican Accredited Media Participants, or VAMPs), the distribution of papal speeches, etc. All those aspects are related to the papal visit, which means there is almost no Vatican supervision or interest in the communication efforts during either the preparatory or the post-event period.

Thus, we close this paper articulating three hopes. First, that the Congregation for Laity, Family, and Life (the new Vatican entity just approved by Pope Francis, englobing both mentioned pontifical councils)²⁵, create the office for large Church events, including both WMF and WYD, for the sake of synergy, common learning points and savings between both events. Second, that this new office, just described, dedicate more attention to their communication aspects, according to their essentially communicative nature, and also, facilitate a candid and fluid exchange of experiences – positive and negative – between the acting organizing committee and its predecessors. Third and final, that the new Secretariat for Communications assumes a role in these processes, understanding these events as key and invaluable initiatives for the communication of the Universal Church.

Notes

1. We left out a few other quite interesting topics, such as the preparation of spokespersons for a large event (cf. Jack Valero & Austen Ivereigh (2011), *Who know Where They Stand – Catholic Voices and the papal visit to the UK*, Edusc), how to do its communication plan & strategy, proposals for a sponsorship program for a religious event, the event's crisis plan or different ways to create an international volunteer team to produce content, that we leave for a future paper.
2. We were graciously granted access to the final reports of some of the above mentioned large Church events. Nevertheless, those reports are working documents for internal use,

have not been published yet and we did not have the authorization to use direct quotes. Even so, we think the experiences they contain could be useful for future Church event organizers and communicators, so we decided to include ideas taken from them.

3. One reason for this is that many organizers of large Church events are one of two types of people: either they do not come from the professional field of communications and thus happily return to their previous work after the event, or they are practitioners and not academics, and speculative thinking and scientific writing are not among their strengths.
4. As Mayor of London from 2000 to 2008, Livingstone initiated and oversaw his City's winning bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics. Cf. http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/other_sports/olympics_2012/4275893.stm
5. On the reasons why St. John Paul II invented WYD, cf. his apostolic letter 'Amici Dilecti', 31-III-1985; in *Crossing of Threshold Hope*, a book interview with journalist Vittorio Messori, John Paul II gives credit to the young people as regarding this 'invention': chapter XIX. As for WMF, cf. his address to the first World Meeting of Families in Rome, 8-X-1994.
6. The effectiveness of these events has no correlation to the numbers, but to the impact they have on those who take part. It has yet to be proven that the bigger the event, the more pastoral fruits it bears.
7. Of course, the communication director's role starts with convincing everybody within the organizing committee that all communication initiatives should pass through his or her department. WYD 2011 and 2013 experiences show that quite often, all members of the committee are quite keen to communicate on their own.
8. Even more: as WYD 2013 and WMF 2015 showed eloquently, there is no bigger problem than the leak of internal documents: maps, transportation plans, etc. For instance, in WMF 2015, a map which showed large sections of the venue for the Papal Mass labeled "ticketed areas" was published on the Volunteer Department's Twitter account before any ticketed areas had been announced. The messaging up until that point was that no ticket was necessary to attend the event. The map resulted in significant negative press and confusion among prospective event participants.
9. This is an ongoing political corruption scandal in Spain and one of the largest corruption scandals in recent Spanish history. The investigative operation was given the name Gürtel in a cryptic reference to one of the principal suspects, Francisco Correa (Correa means belt in Spanish, Gürtel in German). The accusations include bribery, money laundering and tax evasion. Early estimates of the money lost from public finances amounted to at least €120M. Spain's highest-circulation daily newspaper, *El País*, won a major press award (an Ortega y Gasset Award) in 2010 for investigative journalism on the topic. The papal trip was an occasion for those politicians and businessmen to steal public money. For instance, the local government funded the TV signal production with €2,1M, but the production company was paid only €800K: the rest was stolen. So, for two years, the new findings about this mismanagement were cover stories in all newspapers, usually using Pope Benedict picture to illustrate the news: cf., for instance, *El País*, 2-XII-2010.
10. Transparency goes with public trust. For instance, WYD 2011 made public much more financial information than WMF 2015, and nevertheless this was an issue in Madrid and not in Philadelphia. Why? Because media and public opinion in the US knew that all City Hall's expenses will be known and covered by the event's organizers, while in Spain there were serious doubts that those info would be made public.
11. The WYD which applied a more radical outsourcing policy was Rio de Janeiro: the organizing committee hired five different companies, to handle the website, media relations, the international media center, content and its sponsorship program. The results were not satisfactory neither in economic terms.
12. Actually, if the sole mission of a Church event communications plan is good public relations, then this story does not have a happy ending. After weeks of tough criticism of the Archbishop in the media, the teacher became a sort of culture hero and was eventually

- invited to be among those who greeted Pope Francis at the White House. Nevertheless, the authors of this paper firmly believe the Archbishop was right.
13. At WYD 2013, for example, the local team was so busy with technical issues that a relevant part of the content production fell on the seven members of the international team: writing press releases, briefings for press conferences and Q&A documents, quality advice in difficult situations, etc.
 14. For instance, in Madrid 2011 the director of the scientific and research information department of the University of Navarra, was 'lent' to WYD for six months.
 15. This happened also in other papal trips. For instance, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on the occasion of Pope Benedict's visit to the US (15/20-4-2008), organized a team made of 22 diocesan communication directors to deal properly with media requests. Cf. Finnerty, 'Pope Benedict XVI's Visit to the United States: a Communications Success' (2010), in Arasa & Milán, *Church Communication & the Culture of Controversy*, Edusc, 412. This team was critical in the pastoral and communicational success of that papal trip.
 16. In WYD 2011, more than 53% of credentialed media representatives were from outside Spain, and in WMF 2015, the number of non-American media reached 37%.
 17. Its members were Mark von Riedemann y María Lozano (Kirche-in-Not), came from Germany; Jack Valero (Catholic Voices), from the United Kingdom; Daniel Arasa, Jorge Milán y Alfonso Bailly-Bailliere (Pontifical University of the Holy Cross), from Rome; and Marisa Salazar (Cáritas), Paloma García Ovejero y Damián Cabrera, from Spain.
 18. Its members were María Lozano (KIN-Germany), Marilú Esponda (UP-México), Thierry Bonaventura (CCEE-Switzerland), Rafael Rubio (JMJ2011-Spain) and Austen Iveleigh (Catholic Voices-UK).
 19. Its members were Thierry Bonaventura (CCEE-Switzerland), Manuel Sánchez (PUSC-Italy), Anna Chmura (WYD 2016-Poland), Yago de la Cierva (PUSC), Jamie Lynn Black and Cecilia O'Reilly (USA).
 20. Or even worse: in one of the WYD 2011 organizing committee meetings on economic matters, one of its members asked: 'can we organize WYD without a media center'? Cfr. Abad & al (2013), *Así fue la JMJ y así se la contamos*, Eunsa, 177. So far, all WYD and WMF have had media centers, maybe because the Vatican organizers of papal visits require them.
 21. Yet, it should not be a luxury place: what reporters want is a functional working place because they will spend many hours there, and anything that avoid waste of time in transportation. So in case of doubt, better an old but central and well-communicated place than a fancy conference center far from the events or their hotels. Also, make sure they have food services nearby.
 22. In WMF 2015, credentialing was free and gave access to the media center and to the possibility of being selected to be part of the pools covering the small events. In contrast, being in the risers during the two main events, Saturday evening Festival of Families and Sunday's Papal Mass, the rate card was USD 22,000 for a media box, USD 15,000 for a stand-up position, USD 7,500 for a videographer alone, and USD 1,500 for a chair for a written media reporter.
 23. WYD 2011 even covered the cost of the satellite uplink, so any network willing to broadcast the papal visit could take it for free, and assume only the downlink expenses.
 24. As an example, in WMF 2015 the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore Romano* offered to publish two long articles, one after the event and a second one just afterwards with a balance of the papal visit, but the communications department did not have anybody with time enough to write them. The same happened with several other outlets.
 25. "On Tuesday 22 October, at the beginning of the general congregation of the Synod of Bishops, the Holy Father made the following announcement: "I have decided to establish a new dicastery responsible for laity, family and life, which will replace the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for the Family. The Pontifical Academy for Life will be joined to the new dicastery". *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23-11-2015.

Disclosure statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of this article.

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