

**ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
EDITORIAL BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS:
JOURNALISTIC POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

November 9, 2023

Background

In 2022, the Primate asked the then-Prolocutor, the Rev Dr Karen Egan, and a current member of the Communications Coordinating Committee, Canon (Lay) Ian Alexander, to work with the Editorial Board, senior management at the Office of the General Synod, and senior journalistic staff to identify lessons learned from the handling of the previous year's unfinished and unpublished *Epiphanies* story, and recommend steps to improve the handling of such cases in the future. It was anticipated by the Primate that this review could include asking the Editorial Board to formulate specific journalistic policies and practices to address the problems revealed by this incident.

This is very much within the mandate of the Editorial Board, as per Appendix C of the General Synod Handbook: "to review journalistic performance in the light of the mandate and editorial policy," and "to consider, in a timely manner, relevant journalistic matters referred to it." The Appendix also notes that "editorial policy may be modified from time to time by the Council of General Synod, on the advice of the Editorial Board."

Dr Egan and Canon Alexander brought seven specific questions to the Editorial Board for its consideration, under three broad headings: "Relationship of Management to Journalism," "Journalistic Policies and Practices," and "Other Related Matters." The Editorial Board's response, which follows, adopts a similar structure.

This document has gone through numerous drafts, the latest of which has been approved by the Editorial Board. It also incorporates and responds to comments made by senior management. The Communications Committee has reviewed a slightly earlier version, and recommended it in principle to the Council of General Synod. The drafting process has also benefited from learnings gained from the handling of some other sensitive stories in the intervening months.

It is anticipated that this will be a living document, capturing the current state of understanding and agreement among the parties (Editorial Board, senior management, and journalistic leadership). As such, it is likely to be updated from time to time, by mutual agreement.

Introduction

Appendix C sets out the mandate, governance and editorial policy of the *Anglican Journal* and other print and digital publications of the Anglican Church of Canada. It says, *inter alia*, that their purpose is "to connect and reflect the Church to internal and external audiences, providing a forum for the full range of voices and views across the Church." To that end, the *Anglican Journal* is "committed to representing the widest possible diversity of information and opinion across the Anglican Church of Canada" – and, indeed, beyond. "It promotes informed engagement by Anglicans in the life of their church, and nurtures healthy self-reflection, respectful dialogue and constructive debate."

At the same time, the *Journal* is "a journalistic enterprise, and as such is expected to adhere to the highest standards of journalistic responsibility, accuracy, fairness, accountability and transparency. Its journalism is fact-based, fact-checked and in-depth, tackling important issues, asking and answering

difficult questions.” Any journalistic enterprise can only live up to these expectations to the extent that it is – and is seen to be – relatively free from external control or interference.

This is a delicate balancing act. Management has the right to suggest potential themes, subjects and story ideas to journalistic staff, and journalistic staff have the duty to give them due consideration. At the same time, management has an obligation to safeguard and defend journalistic integrity – most especially in those cases when it is the church itself that is the subject of the story.

The Editorial Board encourages the Office of the General Synod to affirm the Board’s key role in advising the editor of the *Journal*, and when necessary senior management, of how best to maintain this balance. For its part, the Editorial Board acknowledges the legitimate role of management in exercising oversight of all the publications of the General Synod. There may be times when these values compete with each other. This document is intended to provide guidance to the parties in resolving such conundrums in a spirit of collaboration.

Relationship of Management to Journalism and General Principles

1. Many journalistic organs that are part of large public institutions state clearly that their journalistic standards do not change when they cover a story related to their parent or partner institutions. For instance, the CBC’s policy states: “Our standards do not change when the CBC (or a CBC Partner) becomes the story. Public interest guides our choices Although there is a potential conflict of interest, normal techniques of newsgathering and decisions about the nature of coverage are the most useful way to ensure journalistic integrity. This means that there should be clear editorial separation between those people reporting on the stories and those whose priority it is to protect the interests of the Corporation, or its partner” (emphasis added). Given the equilibrium articulated in the foregoing section, this principle clearly applies to the *Journal* and any related publications.
2. Given this underlying principle, the General Synod, as publisher, or CoGS acting on its behalf, or senior management (defined for this purpose as the Primate, General Secretary and Director of Communications) all share a fundamental responsibility not to seek to know or shape editorial content in development for the *Anglican Journal* and related publications prior to publication. To do so would be to violate the fundamental trust placed in them to respect and protect journalistic integrity.
3. It follows that editorial staff have a responsibility to protect the draft status of stories, notes and other information regarding articles in development, and that management (as defined above) should not seek to breach that protected status.
4. Conversely, the editor of the *Anglican Journal* has an obligation to inform the publisher (through senior management) of any article in development that may reflect badly on the Anglican Church of Canada or leave the Church open to legal risk. In such cases, particular care should be taken on both sides to ensure that Principle #3 above is respected.
5. General Synod is the publisher of the *Journal*, and the editor reports to the Director of Communications. It is conventional practice that publishers do not become involved in day-to-day journalistic operations, although in law they can be held responsible for libel, defamation and other damages to reputation. Given all this, as well as the unique role of the *Journal*, the editor should be sensitive to the advice of CoGS and senior Church management.

6. The Editorial Board recommends that all of the above be encapsulated in a short statement, in plain language, incorporated into the masthead of the *Journal*, to the effect that:
 - a. The Publisher (General Synod) respects and defends the principles of journalistic integrity.
 - b. While the Publisher retains the right to intervene in stories which have the potential to bring the institution of the Church into disrepute, it expects to exercise that right rarely, if ever, and only after due process (as defined later in this document).
 - c. In cases of unresolvable conflict or disagreement, the Publisher has the right to order changes, but the changes so ordered must be publicly noted in print or digitally.
 - d. An Editorial Board exists to advise the Editor on journalistic matters. Anyone wishing to raise issues and concerns about stories in the *Journal* should contact the Board at [email address].
7. The Editorial Board also recommends the creation of a new position of Episcopal Advisor to the Editorial Board: a currently active bishop, whose role would be to provide, upon request, advice to the Board regarding editorial matters that have the potential to cause serious tension within the Church, or raise issues of a pastoral nature. They would be consulted at the Board's discretion. Their advice would be non-binding, but would carry considerable moral force.

Journalistic Policies and Practices

The Editorial Board does not believe that a definitive codification of journalistic behaviour governing editorial staff, management and publisher is possible. However, over time, appropriate policies and practices can and should be developed in response to evolving circumstances, gradually accumulating into a journalistic handbook.

The Board proposes the following journalistic guidelines for adoption at the present time.

1. The publisher (General Synod/CoGS) and senior Church management should at all times be aware that the *Journal* and its related publications (in print or digital formats) are journalistic enterprises, and as such are expected to adhere to "the highest standards of journalistic responsibility."
2. The decision on whether the *Journal* should embark on an investigative story into the Church or any of its structures or officials rests with the editor. It is advisable that the editor should consult with the Editorial Board or, at the very least, inform the Editorial Board of such intentions.¹
3. It is the responsibility of the editor to inform the Primate, General Secretary and Director of Communications of the decision to publish any article that risks bringing any part of the Church into disrepute or institutional criticism, or exposes it to potential legal action.
4. If there is the slightest reason for the editor to decide to request legal advice regarding the development of a story, the editor should inform both the Editorial Board and the Director of Communications of their decision.
5. If the editor or Editorial Board perceive that work on, or publication of, an article will cause serious tension within the Church, or raise issues of a pastoral nature, the Board should consult with the Episcopal Advisor, as described under Principle #7 above.

¹ Here and wherever reference is made to communication with the Editorial Board, it is understood that such communication will take place through the Board Chair or designate. It is also understood that time is of the essence in all such communications.

6. CoGS or senior Church management should first consult with the Editorial Board before intervening regarding a *Journal* story, although the Board's approval is not required.
7. CoGS or senior Church management should never intervene regarding a *Journal* story, or direct that a story be commissioned, de-commissioned, altered, or circulated for consultation in advance of publication, without the approval of the editor, or without making clear that the editor is being directly overruled.
8. In those extremely rare cases where CoGS or senior Church management have overruled the editor on the commissioning, de-commissioning, altering or pre-circulation of a story, this should be made known to readers in the form of an editor's note printed in the applicable print issue and/or anglicanjournal.com, adjacent to the modified article, or where the absent article would have run.
9. Management retains a right of reply to any story that is published. This may be a preferable alternative to the process described in Point #8.
10. It is the editor's responsibility to ensure that work on any article "adhere[s] to the highest standards of journalistic responsibility."
11. It is the editor's responsibility to ensure that staff seek above all to establish what is true and fair through sceptical questioning, researching and being open to different points of view, regardless of a writer's or editor's personal beliefs. Ultimately, truth and accuracy should prevail.
12. *Journal* writers and editors should acknowledge that striving for balance can give lies and misinformation the same treatment as truth, if the sources cited to achieve balance are dishonest or ill-informed. Where the honesty or reliability of sources is suspect, the onus is on journalists to check the facts they provide.
13. *Journal* writers and editors are permitted, where necessary, to designate, cite and quote sources as "confidential." However, they must first evaluate whether their statements can be relied upon. They must also weigh the reasons for preserving confidentiality against the desire for transparency. In such cases, the story should include an explanation of why this decision was made.
14. The editor may decide if a source should be permitted to review an article before publication. In general, this practice is discouraged, because (a) stories change as they pass through the editing process; and (b) sources may press reporters on how a story should be written and what statements should be included or excised. In any event, it should be pointed out to the sources that the story belongs to the *Journal* and not to the sources. In certain circumstances – e.g. in the case of sources with a very complex quotation or explanation, or if there is a risk that quotations attributed to a confidential source may expose their identity — the editor may agree to a source having pre-publication access to what has been written for accuracy's sake. Pre-publication access does not constitute a veto over publication.

Other Related Matters

Protocols

1. It is essential to have in place a well-understood procedure for handling difficult journalistic issues in a timely fashion. Management and journalistic leadership should review current protocols to ensure they are fully consistent with this document, and share them with the Editorial Board. This process should be repeated on a periodic basis.

Training

1. Journalistic policies, practices, guidelines, procedures and protocols, as amended from time to time, should be brought together in a single, accessible form and made available to all journalists, relevant members of senior management, and members of the Editorial Board.
2. A simple, effective process of orientation for current employees and Board members should be undertaken whenever the standards, practices or protocols are amended, and for new employees and Board members when they join the organization.

The Editorial Board

1. The Editorial Board exercises no direct authority over the operations of the *Journal* and its related publications. Its role is to advise the editor on what constitutes “the highest standards of journalistic responsibility” and to provide a consultative body to the editor on developing and assessing journalistic ideas.
2. The role of the Editorial Board is also “to review journalistic performance in the light of its mandate and editorial policy [of the *Journal* and related publications].” The Appendix also notes that “editorial policy [of the *Journal*] may be modified from time to time by the Council of General Synod, on the advice of the Editorial Board.
3. It is hoped that the editor will see the Editorial Board as their consultative partner in journalistic endeavours.
4. The Editorial Board is also expected “to consider, in a timely manner, relevant journalistic matters referred to it” by senior Church management, CoGS, the editor, and other parties. This means that the Board is the appropriate place to refer complaints about Church journalism – whether from individuals who are the subject of such coverage or from the general public – for investigation, adjudication and response.
5. If a member of the Editorial Board perceives that they may have an actual or potential conflict of interest in discharging their role on the Board, it is incumbent upon them to declare it. Likewise, any member of the Board should bring to the Board’s attention any actual or potential conflict which they believe exists on the part of another member. The Board as a whole will then decide how best to determine (a) whether or not a conflict exists; and (b) if so, what steps need to be taken. They may wish to designate someone to advise them about this. This advisor may or may not be a member of the Board, or could be the Episcopal Advisor, depending on the circumstances.