

Basic Information:

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Entry Category: Pro Bono Programs
Title of Entry: Challenging Pope Francis to Address Child Sex Abuse
Client: Foundation to Abolish Child Sex Abuse

100-Word Description:

With Pope Francis' first visit to the U.S. looming, The Foundation to Abolish Child Sex Abuse turned to Buchanan Public Relations to help rekindle the uncomfortable—but critical—discussion of the Catholic Church's failed handling of the child sex abuse scandal. FACSAs founder John Salveson hoped to harness the media as a vehicle to remind the public of the thousands of survivors of clergy sex abuse who have never received justice. Ambitious media outreach resulted in prominent placements in more than 50 news articles across the nation and around the world, helping to shine light on a dark and painful topic.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW / OBJECTIVES

Situation Analysis

In September 2015, Pope Francis made his first official trip to the United States. Philadelphia was selected to host the World Meeting of Families for three days, welcoming the pontiff, esteemed clergy, elected officials, celebrities, and several hundred thousands of visitors from around the globe.

The world's eyes were on Philadelphia.

While much of the early news coverage was focused on road closures and the economic impact, there was one story The Foundation to Abolish Child Sex Abuse found to be alarmingly absent from the conversation: the Catholic Church's sex abuse scandal.

Would the Pope publicly address the situation or meet with survivors while in the U.S.?

John Salveson—a prominent Philadelphia business leader, a survivor of clergy abuse, and president and founder of FACS—wanted to use the media as a vehicle to publicly urge the Pope to recognize the victims and discuss tangible steps to identify and prosecute the offending priests.

FACSA enlisted Buchanan Public Relations to develop and execute a media strategy to invite reporters to approach the largely taboo subject matter and spark a national conversation.

Campaign Goals

- Create awareness for survivors of clergy child sex abuse surrounding Pope Francis' historic visit
- Position John Salveson as a spokesperson for the cause
- Underscore flawed, dangerous policies and highlight a call to action

Research

The agency researched prior coverage of clergy sex abuse, as well as outlets that were slated to cover the Pope's visit to the U.S., and learned that:

- Most coverage of the sex abuse scandal was at least a year old
- Most coverage of the Pope's visit was focused on logistics or business
- The topic of child sex abuse was still under-reported
- Other advocacy groups had begun successfully positioning themselves as spokespeople

The team concluded that because there was a strong disinterest—even aversion—to the subject matter, it was going to be a significant challenge to interject FACS into the national coverage of the Pope's visit.

Target Audiences

- National and local media
- Survivors of clergy abuse
- Policy-makers within the Catholic Church

Objectives

- Place **1 op-ed** with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*
- Secure **5 interviews** with national media outlets
- Secure **3 interviews** with Philadelphia news media
- Place written statement with **5 outlets**
- Generate mentions of call-to-action in **majority of news articles**

EXECUTION

Strategies

Position John Salveson as Credible Source. Placing an op-ed with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was the first step in building

Salveson's credibility. In subsequent pitching, we referenced his opinion piece.

Get Ahead of the News. Planting the seed of the story among editors and producers with a news alert prior to the Pope's visit positioned Salveson as top-of-mind for interviews when the topic took off.

Monitoring the Pope's Public Speeches. We closely monitored all public comments to be able to pinpoint if, and precisely when, the pontiff mentioned the sex abuse scandal.

Tactics

We knew how chaotic pitching would be once the Pope arrived in Philadelphia, so we began our planning and outreach well in advance. Specifically, we:

- Created a highly targeted media list of reporters, editors and producers covering either the Pope's visit or the sex abuse scandal
- Pitched Salveson via a news alert in advance of the Pope's arrival in the United States

During the New York leg of his trip, the Pope mentioned clergy sex abuse but erroneously cast the bishops as the victims, not the abuse survivors. This enraged and disappointed the national community of survivors.

But it presented a prime opportunity to offer up John Salveson and FACSA as a spokesperson for the survivor community. Buchanan PR:

- Drafted and distributed a brief pitch offering Salveson for immediate interview
- Drafted a subsequent media statement that we could quickly issue to time-strapped journalists who could easily insert it into their stories

EVALUATION / RESULTS

By all measures, the campaign was a success.

- The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran Salveson's op-ed on July 17
- Based on that op-ed, reporters from both the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Washington Post* featured John in news stories mid-August; the *Washington Post* story was front page
- These two articles were picked up or analyzed by 9 additional outlets
- Salveson was invited to be a guest on a local NPR affiliate talk show
- After the Pope commented on the sex abuse scandal, Salveson interviewed with 7 major outlets—the *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Philadelphia Magazine*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *CBS3*—which resulted in 35 stories or pickup
- Salveson's prepared media statement was picked up by an additional 5 outlets
- He was also featured in 6 international stories, including BBC
- Calls-to-action were mentioned in approximately 2/3 of the articles
- Salveson had 5 interviews that were not used due to timing issues, including *CNN* and *Associated Press*

Both FACSA and John Salveson were credited by other survivor groups for advancing the conversation nationwide.

The *New York Times* used Salveson for background purposes during its research on a major, front-page piece it ran the week before the Pope's visit and included him in its follow-up piece on the sex abuse scandal the day after the Pope's speech to the bishops, which was picked up by X outlets.