

FAITH-BASED SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM

HOW can **journalists of faith** critically examine the work of churches and people in power while *affirming* the value of the faith they share? How can they help people see the world *as it really is* — neither the flattened version of religion they see in secular media nor a glossy, feel-good narrative without accountability?



Solutions journalism poses a path forward.

What is Solutions Journalism?

A **solutions story** asks and answers **four questions** (we call them “**pillars**”) to tell a more complete story:

- 1 How does the **solution** work?
- 2 What **evidence** backs up the claim?
- 3 What are the **limitations** of the solution?
- 4 How do we **replicate/spread/grow** it?

Why this speaks to faith-based audiences:

Principles like **healing, redemption, honesty, justice, and compassion** are part of most religions. All of those can be explored the more seriously we take solutions reporting.

What Solutions Journalism *isn't*...

Fluff, promotional content, pie-in-the-sky, or hero-worship. By demanding real evidence to back up claims, and discussing the scalability and limitations of a solution, journalists protect against unrealistic coverage and flattery.

Proselytization or advocacy. Your outlet may hold certain values and beliefs, but for it to be a solutions story, reporters should not be drawing broader “therefore” conclusions about values and beliefs from the solution. *Leave the teaching and preaching to the teachers and preachers!*

Why this speaks to faith-based audiences:

Religious groups have been taken advantage of by *charlatans* who exploit the trusting relationships within the group. We can *protect* our neighbors by carefully examining claims of success. As group members, we also want to be sure that the institutions that represent us are *doing what they say they're doing*, and that the work done in our name is living up to its promises. By moving away from hero-driven endeavors and toward community-wide solutions, we're reminded that *faith connects ordinary people to extraordinary aspiration*.

Why this speaks to faith-based communities:

Because when we don't have an “angle” or hidden agenda we build trust and open doors to conversations where people *can connect on human and spiritual levels*.

Bringing solutions journalism into your coverage

As a **faith-based journalist**, you're probably already covering certain topics that could support a solutions lens. Let's take a look at two sample topics to see how they might look with a *solutions lens*...



- 1 Exposure and repair of institutional harm.** Sometimes an investigation is appropriate, to surface the wrong and hold those responsible to account. Solutions can complement your investigation by demonstrating that repair is possible.
- 2 Religious communities' relationship to social systems (schools, healthcare, childcare, etc.)** "Feel-good" stories from local news outlets often feature a church-based mentorship, clinic, food pantry, or some other social service. Those stories can be launchpoints for deeper exploration of faith communities' efforts to help their members and neighbors in substantive ways.

Special considerations for faith-based outlets

Solutions journalism most commonly looks at *big, society-wide concerns* like climate change, education, and injustice. What about *religion-specific concerns*, like **declining church attendance** or **sectarian disagreement**?



Bring it on! Solutions journalism isn't tied to any particular issue. It's a tool or a skill set just like investigative journalism and public service journalism.

The "limitations" pillar can be a challenge for faith-based outlets: Religious communities may fear that admitting flaws or inadequacies opens them up to harsh criticism. Editorial teams can discuss how embracing limitations might fit with your institutional values and beliefs. It also helps to differentiate between stories wherein religion itself is the solution, and *solutions that are connected to religious values or principles*.

Want to know more?

Come to our webinar **June 14** to learn how to bring a solutions lens into your coverage:
solu.news/faithbasedsojo



Visit solu.news/faithbasedstories for examples of solutions stories in faith-based media

Contact **Keith Hammonds**, program manager, at keith@solutionsjournalism.org

**SOLUTIONS
JOURNALISM
NETWORK**