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# Hope with Teeth: Solutions Journalism for Faith-based Audiences

Bekah McNeel, SJN trainer and freelance journalist

April 21

@soljourno #TheWholeStory

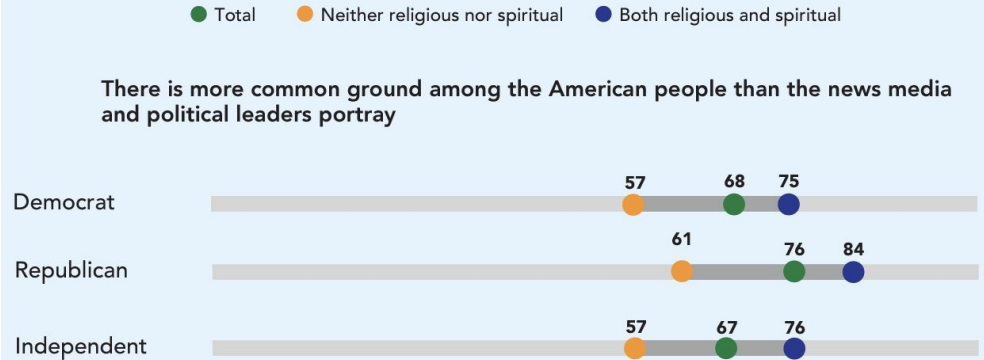
What's one story that  
faith-based audiences  
look to faith-based  
journalists to tell?

38%  
of people  
globally report  
avoiding the  
news because it's  
too negative

Reuters Institute  
Digital News Report  
2022

Americans who are both religious and spiritual are especially likely to believe the news media and political leaders exaggerate divisiveness.

Figure 5. Percent of Americans who somewhat or strongly agree with the following statement:



**Base:** Total Democrats, N=829; Total Republicans, N=600; Total Independents, N=578; Democrats both religious and spiritual, N=322; Republicans both religious and spiritual, N=326; Independents both religious and spiritual, N=207; Democrats neither religious nor spiritual, N=319; Republicans neither religious nor spiritual, N=175; Independents neither religious nor spiritual, N=238

# ‘Hope with teeth’

“Readers are fairly sophisticated, and they know when they are being force-fed something. ... The idea [of solutions journalism] is not to change minds; it’s to show possibilities.”

—*Claudia Rowe*

# Why do solutions journalism?

It's **good** for your audience.

It's **good** for your community.

It's **good** journalism.

# What we'll do today

1

Show how solutions journalism is compatible with the mission of faith-based journalism

2

Define solutions journalism and its four key elements

3

Workshop solutions reporting for faith-specific stories

# Solutions Journalism

## THE BASICS



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SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM IS:

rigorous,  
evidence-based  
reporting on  
responses to social  
problems.



# THE FOUR PILLARS

Features not just a person or an organization, but a *response* to a problem

Provides available *evidence* of results, looking at effectiveness — not just intentions

Discusses *limitations*

Seeks to provide *insights* that can help others respond — not just inspiration

# WHY THE FOUR PILLARS MATTER TO FAITH-BASED AUDIENCES:

*Principles like **healing**, **redemption**, **honesty**, **justice**, and **compassion** are part of most religions. Solutions Journalism takes those things **seriously**, and reports on the impact they are having in the world.*

# EXERCISE

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## ANNOTATE A STORY

1. What is the problem and the response?
2. What's the evidence?
3. What are the limitations?
4. What insights are included about the response?
5. Do the visuals reflect the response?

# THE FOUR PILLARS PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES WHEN REPORTING ON FAITH

*How might reporting on **limitations** be challenging for faith-based outlets?*

# IS SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM ADVOCACY? IS IT FLUFF?

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The four pillars help us keep a rigorous, accountability-driven relationship to our subject—not awe or “awwww”—including limitations, evidence, and insights, we have to ask hard questions.

*Why this speaks to faith-based communities: 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.*

# CHALLENGE

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## What would you need in order to turn this into a solutions-focused story?

### Amid Scandals and Politics, Poland's Youths Lose Faith in Catholic Church

The Polish church is in a deep crisis, as its authority is sapped by cascading sexual abuse scandals and as more people grow wary of its perceived alliance with the country's right-wing government.

By ANDREW HIGGINS



From the New York Times

Yes, it's just **good journalism**

Makes our stories **stronger**, tells the **whole story** and strengthens **accountability ...**

... by investigating **solutions to the problems** right in front of us

HOME & FAMILY

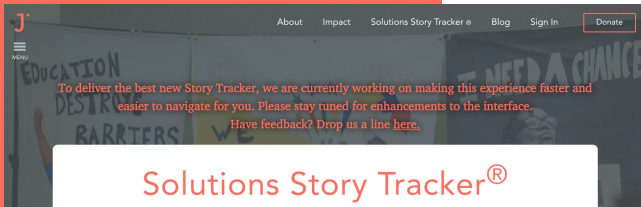
## How One Atlanta Church Took on COVID-19

Consistent messaging, a vaccine drive and strong leadership have kept parishioners safe



Pastor Wayne Mack (far right) with (from left to right) Georgia state Rep. Kim Schofield, church member Johnnie Wright and Mack's wife Michelle.

COURTESY GRACE PLACE CHURCH OF GOD BY FAITH



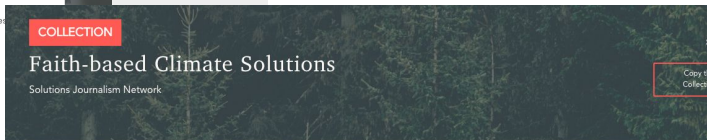
Welcome to a curated database of rigorous reporting on responses to social problems: 12,900 stories produced by 6,000 journalists and 1,600 news outlets, from 187 countries, and growing every day. [Click here](#) to learn more about the Solutions Story Tracker.

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Story

### To Protect the Environment, Buddhist Monks Are Ordaining Trees

In Cambodia, it is Buddhist tradition and protocol to ordain a tree when a new monk is inducted. Since it is taboo to harm a monk, this practice inadvertently doubled as a conservation tactic by preventing deforestation ongoings, eventually leading those of this faith to be dubbed ecology monks.

[Read More >](#)

<b>AUTHOR</b> August Rick	<b>DATE</b> 2018-10-11	<b>PUBLICATION</b> Sejourners
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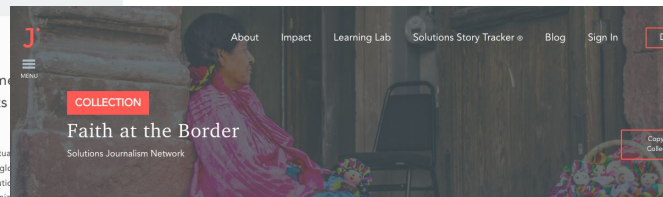
Story

### From Grassroots to Government: Climate Assessment Presents Opportunity

With climate change no longer a hypothetical situation, a tangible problem being felt by many across the globe, efforts are gaining traction as the search for solutions. Citing a moral obligation, these grassroots organizations inspire political action while also making concrete steps the way.

[Read More >](#)

<b>AUTHOR</b> Christina Colón	<b>DATE</b> 2018-12-03	<b>PUBLICATION</b> Sejourners
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Story

### Young Life at the Border

For undocumented youth who commute between El Paso, Texas and Juárez, Mexico for school, finding a community to connect with and feel safe in is especially challenging. The Christian youth organization Young Life is there to fill that gap in immigrant students' lives by offering emotional and spiritual guidance as well as a support system that deals with any and all issues that arise, whether citizenship...

[Read More >](#)

Story

### 'We're Not Optional': Aid Organizations at the Border Adapt to the Pandemic

To continue serving tens of thousands of refugees stuck at the U.S.-Mexico border during the pandemic, shelters have collaborated on an improvised system to deliver food and emergency hotel accommodations, and legal aid via videoconferencing. The border buildup of recent months, a product of the "Remain in Mexico" asylum policy, became a far more complicated humanitarian mission...

[Read More >](#)

storytracker.solutionsjournalism.org  
solutionsjournalism.org/topics/faith-based-solutions-news





# Workshop

# IDENTIFY AN ISSUE OR PROBLEM

Define the issue as precisely as possible.



REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH



- Teen pregnancy
- Gestational diabetes
- C-section rates
- Postpartum depression
- Access to contraception

CLIMATE  
CRISIS



- Regenerative Cattle Ranching
- Carbon reduction in construction
- Heat Island Effect reduction

# QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

- Who's doing it better?
- How does the response work?
- Is it being tried elsewhere? What are the barriers to replication?
- What does the research say? And what do critics say?
- Who is the response working for ... and not working for?

# SOLUTIONS STORY PLANNING

<p><b>Problem</b> - This can be a piece (or small slice) of the problem</p>	<p><b>What response do you want to examine?</b> Pick one to focus on.</p>
<p><b>Evidence:</b> How do we know an effort is working? Is there data? Research? Other people adopting the idea? Other quantitative or qualitative evidence?</p>	<p><b>Limitations/Caveats:</b> Ones you know about or know you need to explore</p>
	<p><b>Insights</b> - Lessons the response might provide to others</p>

# Print: a solutions story in 500 words

Para 1: The response, then summary of problems that led to the response

Para 2: Evidence (data) on the problem+response in your county/country/continent

Para 3 Insight (quotes) from the response implementer, relevant authorities

Para 4-5: Limitations and more Evidence on results (from data, beneficiaries, etc)

Para 6-7: Insight from other parties (a 2nd implementer elsewhere, critics, etc.)

Para 8-9: Insights on lessons from the solution, e.g more evidence from elsewhere

Para 10: Throw-forward on the expansion of the response or future of the response.

## A Solutions Radio Spot: 1 minute or less

- Set up the problem in the host intro
- 1-3 sentences about the details of the response
- Quote - evidence, how the response works, more details
- 1 sentence on limitations, maybe 2 if there's time
- Close out the story with what's next and/or insights

# LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOU



Bekah McNeel

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Keith Hammonds

[keith@solutionsjournalism.org](mailto:keith@solutionsjournalism.org)

Additional optional slides



# Audio/Video: a solutions story in 2 minutes

**Start with a person's story** ----- **20 seconds**

\*Possibly soundbite from the person ----- **10 seconds**

**Describe the problem** ----- **20 seconds**

\*Possibly soundbite from expert ----- **10 seconds**

**Describe the solution** ----- **20 seconds**

\*Soundbite from beneficiary ----- **10 seconds**

**Some evidence of success** ----- **15 seconds**

At least one limitation & insights of the approach ----- **15 seconds**

# IMPACT YOU CAN MEASURE

- ❑ Institutional Change
- ❑ Awards
- ❑ Cross-Pollination

And increases in ...

- ❑ Revenue
- ❑ Trust
- ❑ Audience engagement
- ❑ Civic engagement

# Mediacités: Audience Engagement

As the pandemic reshaped social life in April 2020, the newsroom turned to its audience for the series [“Transforming our cities after the coronavirus.”](#)

- Readers submitted 175 ideas, using the website’s engagement platform called #DansMaVille (#InMyTown),
- Mediacités’ [identify 28 potential stories](#)
- The publication received the 2020 Innovation Award from Médias en Seine for this work

# Fort Worth Star-Telegram: Cross-Pollination

After investigative reporter Nichole Manna wrote about [a program in Richmond, California, dedicated to ending cyclical and retaliatory gun violence](#), Fort Worth established a similar effort. VIP FW (Violence Intervention and Prevention Fort Worth) uses ex-convicts instead of police to intervene in and mediate conflicts.

Manna's [follow-up reporting](#) found evidence that VIP FW is working and successfully mediated at least 25 conflicts in the first few months.