

**United Church of God, *an International Association***  
**Council of Elders Meeting Report**  
**Dec. 9, 2009—Cincinnati, Ohio**

Chairman Roy Holladay called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. by asking Robert Berendt to open with prayer. All members of the Council, except Jim Franks, were present. A number of guests were also present.

**Media Committee Report**

**Media Mix**

Darris McNeely, chairman of the Media Committee, stated that the Media Committee and the administration have had six meetings since the August Council meetings to discuss the media mix. He mentioned that it is a work in progress and a good-faith effort has been put into coming up with the proposed plan.

Mr. McNeely said that the success of our efforts to preach the gospel depends on the entire Church. We will succeed or fail together. No one part of the Church is responsible. It is up to all of us to submit to God and one another in a whole-Church effort—our prayers, support, involvement and dedication must be united on that front.

He continued that we are called now to preach the gospel and Herbert Armstrong understood this as he continually kept this in our minds. Our calling is serious. The preaching of the gospel has always helped create unity for the Church of God. The book of Acts relates that very clearly; and in our modern history, our greatest moments of unity have come when there was a strong and effective evangelistic effort. He commented that “God will bless our effort when we submit to the imperative of the gospel of peace and take it to the world by deed and by example.” He mentioned that we all agree that there is a positive message of hope that the world needs to hear. They also need a message of warning as we draw closer to the end of this age—and they need a message of hope and comfort as well as a place to come to, a place of refuge to be sheltered and nurtured as potential children of God. He stated that this is where it is a “whole Church effort.”

He reported that the Media Committee has worked with the administration and there has been an open atmosphere for various ideas and concerns. He pointed out that the administration expressed its concerns with several areas and recommended a different emphasis with regard to media priorities, but the administration has stated that it will implement, to the best of its ability, the Council’s approved plan.

Darris McNeely commented that the Media Committee adopted the media mix plan recommended by Peter Eddington. Mr. McNeely said that the committee recognizes the concerns of the administration in that this plan institutes an immediate mix without addressing long-term strategies. The administration contends that, without a long-term plan, there is not enough planning regarding how to realign resources (finances and manpower) to take advantage of technological doors that open. The concern is that, in dealing just with the current fiscal year, a pattern could be developed that could make it more difficult to make future changes in media strategy. The committee is aware of this

concern, and is committed to maintaining flexibility and continuing to work on a longer-term strategic plan. Mr. McNeely said that experts in the media field face difficult challenges in forming strategic plans for their companies as well because of the ongoing developments in technology. He mentioned that they basically bet on which way to go, but we rely on God to direct us.

## **Television**

Darris McNeely stated that the media plan presented in February called for producing 30-minute television specials to be run in selected markets for four to six weeks along with an advertising campaign, and ending with public Bible lectures. These programs were to run outside the “religious programming” time on Sunday mornings. He added that the Media Committee looked at this plan and believes it should be modified to build on weekly television programming placed either on cable networks or in individual markets or both.

He continued that all other elements of that plan could be incorporated within a media plan seeking to build an audience. Print and subscriber development could work with a targeted market building toward a “special” program developed to run within that market. He also said that this could coincide with a special public lecture campaign with the intent of building personal contact between the local congregation(s) and interested subscribers and viewers. Mr. McNeely then stated that the difference with this approach is the time taken to build an audience within an area, possibly one with a large congregation. He said that regular weekly TV, as opposed to occasional one-time programming, develops a presence for the Church that endures within a community. Spreading this from city to city, a region and a nation receives an effective witness of the gospel.

Television specials could still be in the mix, Mr. McNeely continued. As an audience is built, special television programming could be considered. He stated that there have been some excellent new (and younger) hires to the media department in recent months—people who are capable of producing very high-quality programs. He said that their hearts are good, and it is nice to see the youth being used in the work of the Church. In the long term, hopefully this will be significant in building a commitment to the Church and this way of life by our young people.

He acknowledged that it is God who calls and adds to the Church, but, as we spread the seed, we build on the solid infrastructure of our local congregations and ministry. People can connect to the people on a local level as they are ready and as they are called by God.

Mr. McNeely then listed the following reasons for more emphasis on TV:

- Television is the most persuasive of all current forms of mass media.
- Television historically generates a high quality subscriber or prospect.
- Television is a regular teaching tool people can use every week—religious programs are church for many people.
- It builds an audience and a relationship with people.

- Used with a vigorous television-related Internet site, it can send people to the Internet for more information to deepen the relationship. The plans are for television to drive people to the Web. And the Web will continue to be developed and improved. As well, the plan is to have items of a video nature on our Web sites. As television and the Internet merge, we will be well along in that technology.
- A television presence will help us develop the brand essence of the Church in a visual and personal manner.

He continued that data from Nielsen shows the number of hours Americans spend watching television is continuing to increase despite people also spending more time in front of their computers and PDAs. The average person spends four hours and 49 minutes per day watching TV, which is up four minutes from the 2007-08 season and has risen 20 percent from 10 years ago. Average TV viewing per day was about four hours from 1991 to 2000, but since then it has steadily risen to almost five hours per day.

Our constant challenge, he stated, whether it is a three-minute segment or a 30-minute program, will be to make it compelling and interesting—to get someone’s attention with the message we have and what we are all about. He continued that whatever is produced must be inspired by God’s Spirit and must grab viewers’ attention. Experience gained from television will only enhance our total media effort.

Mr. McNeely mentioned there is no question that commercial television is expensive. While the administration is clear in its desire to develop television as part of our media mix to add credibility and exposure to our message, its concern is that, to do it right, we must not only invest in air time but also hire new staff—a cost that must be balanced against pulling manpower and financial resources away from areas with greater reach or cost-effectiveness. Therefore, the administration cautions that we should enter the TV arena slowly, carefully testing its effectiveness as we go. The Council is agreed that TV must lead people to the Internet and recognizes the administration’s concerns about our capacity to make the needed improvements for proper Web support. Mr. McNeely stated that the Council is calling for \$400,000 from the media budget in this fiscal year, but even that will not all be spent in this fiscal year because of the time needed to ramp up TV. The Council understands the need to go slowly, testing, pulling back when and where necessary, correcting, reformatting and learning as we go forward.

He commented that the Media Committee considers the Web the hub, and all other forms of media are the spokes—television, radio, print, blogs, advertising, etc. He asked if anyone sees the Church going completely out of the print business. He responded that it is not likely, but print must be managed for optimization.

He then proposed the following action needed—to fulfill the strategy, we would begin placement of *Beyond Today* on commercial broadcast television by April 1, 2010, with the goal of creating a broad audience awareness of the benefits of God’s way of life.

### **The Internet: What Role Should It Take Now?**

The Media Committee believes, said Mr. McNeely, that the Internet is a key to future gospel efforts and more resources need to be invested in the Internet in order to

develop state-of-the-art Internet sites. With the Internet being the hub, the main support, it will only grow bigger in importance with each passing year. The committee sees our Internet sites containing greater quantity and quality of content, with other media efforts directing people to those sites.

He commented that, increasingly, all video content will be delivered via the Web. There will be a time when most written content will be delivered primarily through the Web and it will become the Church's primary tool for reaching people with the gospel, but that time is not here yet.

He stated that the administration's position is that the proposed plan will lower the priority we have had in Web development, thus limiting the Church's ability to build the present and future capacity to preach the gospel through the Web. Serious Web development requires long-term commitments in skilled staff who can work on long-term goals. He said that the administration's concern is that most of the Internet budget in this plan goes into advertising to promote print, and continuing in this direction will make it more difficult to transition to a better balance from the current more than 70 percent of the media outreach budget allocated to print. He mentioned that the administration's concern is that the Council needs to include, in any future media mix, a transition strategy of three to five years to rebalance our media efforts to move from a print-centered mix to a Web-centered mix. The committee recognizes that, in time, this type of transition will have to be made and that there will need to be an ongoing focus on how to make that change. Mr. McNeely then pointed out that one of the Churchwide issues being struggled with in the area of media—Web strategies, television and, to a degree, print—is the limitation (whether in hiring people or assigning them to a task) of the absence of a plan. He mentioned that, over the past two years, the Council has been concerned about the amount of allocated funds that have not been spent in the media budget, and part of that is the absence of a plan to adequately spend those allocated funds.

Melvin Rhodes stated that a *USA Today* article reported that all four of the major networks in the United States have seen an increase in their viewership in the last few months. Roy Holladay read an article that substantiated what the Media Committee reported with regard to television and Internet watching. The report stated that people are both adding platforms and extending their viewing times. Victor Kubik said that the Internet is becoming the primary avenue in media. He pointed out that the Internet has become the ally of the other media avenues. He pointed out that when the Internet was first introduced, it was seen as a threat to TV news broadcasters; but they soon realized they needed to use it to their advantage, not make it a competitor. He commented that technology is shifting quickly, and it could be in our favor with having video on the Web.

Mr. McNeely said that a commitment has been made to form a production team that will focus on the Church's video presentations and draw in some dedicated scriptwriters, content producers and a Web developer—using the existing staff and our younger members' talents—to begin to develop this. He mentioned that the foundational talent is already in place.

Paul Kieffer asked about the budget for radio. Mr. McNeely responded that currently nothing is budgeted for radio.

Doug Horchak asked what the fundamental difference is between the 30-minute specials the administration prefers and the weekly programs the Media Committee has proposed. He said he would like to know the distinction between the two ideas. Larry Salyer responded that the original response from the administration was 10 months ago. At that time, considering the amount of money required and the need to produce a higher-quality product, including “closed-captioning,” it was felt that the media department could not gear up for weekly television as quickly as it appeared the department was being asked to do. Mr. Salyer also stated that the administration has differences of opinion with regard to the effectiveness of the 3½-year television efforts in Canada. He mentioned that, when he sees those figures, he thinks, “this isn’t working very well”; while others think it is working well, including those in Canada. He commented that the Church has never dealt with cost per response (CPR) in the areas of \$40 to \$50. He stated that the department is in a position to better handle weekly television now. He said that at least one, if not two, more employees will be needed to write scripts. He commented that he is more concerned with the balance of television to the Web, because television will create more print requests than will the Internet.

Mr. McNeely said that these points have been discussed for hours and the committee understands what the administration presented. He commented that the airing of *Beyond Today* in Canada has given us a great deal of information to work with and the Media Committee is not pleased with the CPR but also recognizes that it is not the sole measurement for the effectiveness of a program. The audience age in Canada, he continued, appears to be coming down.

Doug Horchak asked who made the determination with regard to the statement about the Internet, “the time has not yet arrived.” He asked if that was a determination based on our commitment or are we looking for something technological to indicate when that time is? Mr. McNeely responded that this is the goal we are working toward, and it has not completely arrived as yet. The fruit will determine it—things like hits and clicks—based on what we are doing and what is happening in the world of technology.

Mr. Horchak mentioned that the plan for television is a huge commitment, but he thinks it is exciting and wonderful. He stated that he assumes this is going to be beta-tested. Mr. McNeely responded that no one wants to spend funds we do not have, but only what is within the budgeted plan.

With a question from Paul Kieffer, Larry Salyer responded that the idea is to launch commercial television in April 2010 with what we have already, with hopefully a fall launch for an improved program. Jason Lovelady stated that the budget of \$70,000 for Web research and development is no longer there with this commitment to weekly television. Mr. Salyer stated that the administration is aware that the Internet currently leads people to order print material. Peter Eddington commented that the Media Department is working toward leading people to look at our literature online instead of requesting a hard copy.

Mr. McNeely commented that the Media Committee sees television as a means to add high-quality subscribers. He stated that there are other ways, beyond this current discussion, to develop high-quality subscribers.

Mr. Salyer mentioned that the Media Department has been working from the understanding that the foremost strategy of the Strategic Plan was to develop the Web and to keep up with it should the economy decline, making the Internet the fallback position should funds require it.

Bill Eddington said that he supports this television plan, and it will be very well received by the Church community. He commented that we will just have to wait and see what the material benefit will be. He then asked about the thought that television historically produces high-quality subscribers. He commented that, historically, he believes this was not the case. Peter Eddington mentioned that television is extremely persuasive and a half-hour program gives time to educate the viewers. When someone like this responds, it is someone who is more interested than the individual responding to a card advertising a magazine with very little information. A television viewer can learn quite a bit about the Church before deciding to subscribe. He said that responses in Canada show that 35 percent are repeat customers, and they are considered high-quality subscribers. With regard to Internet subscribers, he pointed out that they renewed the least of almost all subscribers, while those who renew the most are those who originally subscribed due to a *Reader's Digest* ad, followed by television and radio.

Bill Eddington asked if consideration has been given to reformatting the current program in any way in order to take full advantage of commercial television. Mr. McNeely replied that the Media Committee has not been involved so much in that area, but it was more of a production issue. However, this is being looked into, he stated, and more adjustments will be made as needed. Larry Salyer commented that there were various issues being considered, and some changes will require other things be changed. He said that this is one reason the first of April was chosen, although we are not in total agreement about that date, to start preliminarily with the idea of improving the program before a formal launch in the fall. He said that some of the changes could be a new format, new setting, a new presenter or a young person to help out as well.

Mr. Salyer, with a question from Bill Eddington, commented that the administration is concerned that the transitional plan be designed with an eye to a three-to five-year plan.

Roy Holladay mentioned his understanding is that television is the one medium by which you can test for effectiveness. He stated that it can be known how many people are watching most programs by the Nielsen ratings. He commented that he has heard the Media Committee and the administration stress that we should begin testing the program in specific markets that demographically represent the United States as a whole. He said that such experimentation could be with format, length of program and various ideas like that. Mr. Salyer commented that it remains to be seen if we can get Nielsen ratings on Sunday mornings. He stated that, in Canada, they can get Nielsen ratings for Vision TV, but Sunday mornings in the United States are generally considered infomercials, and ratings are not published on those programs. He mentioned that the two things to consider, if the program is placed on Sunday morning, are cost per response and the cost-per-thousand viewers—what the reach of the program is. Nielsen reports that there are 11 million viewers for Vision TV, he continued, but only 20,000 are tuned in to the *Beyond Today* program. He said then the question has to be, do we want the witness out there or do we want the program where we know viewers are responding?

Peter Eddington commented that changes to the backdrop, lighting and such can be made quite easily before the April program launch. Larry Salyer stated that, if it is decided to move the Media Center downstairs into part of what is now the warehouse, it would be unwise not to consider expanding the set to include not only a set like we have now, but a set where presenters could stand up as well as an area for interviews.

Jim Franks joined the meeting at this point.

### **Print Publications**

Darris McNeely reported that the Media Committee examined the print part of media and recommends maintaining a practical level of print as part of the media mix. Print continues to be an effective tool in reaching an audience with significant impact. In another 10 to 20 years, it is possible that a majority of people will read news and other content digitally. But the imminent demise of print is not predicted yet.

Mr. McNeely commented on a memo Aaron Booth, Web designer in the home office, recently sent with regard to a magazine for Web content producers. The editor of the magazine wrote an article titled “Who Says Print Is Dead?” The editor was surprised by a key finding from a recent survey of its readers. The survey results demonstrate that print magazine readers clearly find value in the old ink-and-paper content, even if their business is creating and delivering online content. The editor commented, “I’m still a firm believer that print communications carry with them weight and a substance to which the web still hasn’t caught up.”

Mr. McNeely also read from research sent by Scott Moss, an elder in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The study results he sent, researched by Dynamic Logic, concluded: “Overall, magazine advertising drove consumer attitudes and intended behavior more effectively and efficiently than viewing television advertising alone, or, TV in combination with online advertising. Across the 39 studies, adding magazines to TV and online had the greatest impact on consumer attitudes and intended behavior in three out of five stages: aided brand awareness at the top of the purchase funnel, and brand favorability and purchase consideration/intent at the key conversion and action stages at the bottom of the funnel. For ad awareness, magazines and TV virtually tied in their contribution. For the consumer packaged goods category, magazines when added to TV and online were also the largest contributor in three out of five stages: ad awareness, brand favorability and purchase consideration/intent. For the non-packaged goods category, as with overall results, magazines when added to TV and online were the largest contributor for aided brand awareness, brand favorability, and purchase consideration/intent. Magazines were the most cost effective medium throughout the purchase funnel.”

Other findings were presented to the Council supporting this information as well.

Mr. McNeely stated that the Media Committee concluded that print remains a critical media for the Church and a proper mix of print and online content will move the Church’s efforts forward to preach the gospel. He continued that the committee believes the Church should strive to get and retain high-quality print subscribers and continue to renew the subscriber list on a regular basis. However, the committee believes the Church

should not launch an ever-increasing level of magazine subscribers with the limited funds available, but achieve and maintain a level of *Good News* subscriptions that can produce coworkers and donors to support growth in the work. He stated that, in the past, approximately 10 percent of donations have come from coworkers and donors. He said that the committee would like to see the initial target of 400,000 U.S. *Good News* magazine subscribers be achieved by the end of the 2010-11 fiscal year.

Peter Eddington mentioned that, when giving away a free magazine, we need to make sure the individual wants it. He pointed out that the newspaper industry is having a rougher go of it than magazines. Scott Ashley said the financial troubles newspapers are having is largely because of the loss of highly profitable classified advertising due to people migrating to Craigslist and eBay. He said that the overall economic climate is hurting magazines because they are losing advertising. This is a primary reason magazines go under rather than a lack of readership. He noted that while it makes news when a large magazine shuts down, industry statistics show that 715 new magazines were launched in 2008 and that number has remained fairly constant in recent years.

Roy Holladay then moved and Scott Ashley seconded that Media and Communications Services implement a broadcast television airing plan in the United States for *Beyond Today* beginning April 1, 2010, and the initial budget for the first 12 calendar months of airtime be a minimum of \$400,000, to be reviewed annually as budget and finances permit. The Council, by a ballot of 11 for and one abstention (Jim Franks), approved the motion.

### **Brand Engagement Project Update**

Darris McNeely reported that the Church is now in phase three of five phases of the brand engagement exercise, and the process remains on target, on time and within budget. He stated that, in the first phase, “We determined our project initiative to be the development of a critical essence or brand essence, which is a very concise articulation of the heart and soul of the Church and the gospel message. Once clearly expressed, our critical essence will guide the work in all its activities, setting all boundaries, founding all initiatives, guiding all communications and every business practice within the organization.” The goal is to have a two- to three-word expression of our brand essence by February 2010.

The Church of God is not a business, but the Branding Task Force believes that the more clearly and succinctly we express our purpose, our unique attributes and our most admirable aspirations, the better the Church can communicate and integrate our message and unify the efforts of each member.

The report, prepared by Brian Shaw, a member of the Branding Task Force, continued by stating that, in phase two, Northlich conducted an e-mail survey of our subscribers to help further define our target audience and better understand the United Church of God as it is perceived today. In addition, Northlich also conducted detailed phone surveys with members of the Branding Task Force to help them understand what we believe to be “our positive and negative attributes and equities as they exist today.” Northlich agents summarized and presented their findings at the workshop on Nov. 19, providing a good foundation for the project. Consistent themes were evident: Bible,

biblical, truth, conservative, teaching, education, faithful, truthful, honest. Northlich summarized these into four themes:

1. Integrity and authenticity.
2. Relationships.
3. Doctrine.
4. Outreach.

Phase three began with the Essence Workshop. There were 22 UCG members, administrators, writers and marketing and Internet contributors gathered together and led by Northlich representatives in several exercises, from which a set of potential essence statements will be built. “Northlich will then work with us to reach consensus on these prior to validating them with our targets in phase four.”

In phase four, Northlich will present its list of themes to members of the Branding Task Force by Dec. 11. “Once the final list is determined, Northlich will then optimize the leading brand essence direction by screening this set of statements with a focus group representative of our target audience, and in an online survey with a sample of 400 outside prospects.” This should be completed by mid-January 2010.

The report stated that, in phase five, Northlich will work with the task force “to develop a compelling and differentiated critical essence and brand triangle that will be founded on clearly defined benefits, a description of our persona, and the attributes and features that set the Church and our message apart.” The entire process is scheduled to be completed Feb. 12, 2010.

Bill Eddington asked if there are any provisions to explain the concept of “branding” to the membership. Clyde Kilough stated that there are ongoing articles planned for *United News* to explain what “branding” is and what it is not. Larry Salyer said that it is a challenge to fully explain it and to make it understandable to the readership.

### **Upcoming Council Meeting Dates**

The Council agreed to have their upcoming face-to-face meetings as follows:

Feb. 21-25, 2010.

May 4-6, 2010.

Aug. 8-12, 2010.

Dec. 5-9, 2010.

Feb. 27-March 3, 2011.

May 17-19, 2011.

### **President’s Assessment Form**

Bill Eddington, chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee, mentioned that the document for the assessment of the president is very important since the assessment of the president must be conducted at the February meetings of the Council. The Council reviewed the proposal, with accompanying documentation. The Council of Elders agreed

to the overall process, the assessment form and the chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee compiling the information from the assessment forms.

With a question from Jim Franks, Bill Eddington said that the individual assessments from the members of the Council would need to be received by him no later than Jan. 15 in order for the consolidated assessment form to be pulled together.

After that, Bill Eddington moved and Doug Horchak seconded to approve the overall process for the assessment of the president, the assessment form and the chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee compiling the information from the assessment forms. The Council of Elders unanimously approved the motion.

The Council went into executive session for the rest of the day's meeting.

*-end-*

Gerald Seelig  
*Council Reporter*

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