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Report on Problem-Solving Alternatives

Herald of Truth

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REPORT ON PROBLEM-SOLVING ALTERNATIVES

The participants in the Herald of Truth workshop March 13, 14 were asked to consider the following problem:

The Apostle Paul made a statement all who are effective in evangelism know to be true: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22).

Applying this to evangelism through mass communication, we must speak to people where they are in terms they understand. Unfortunately, many brethren fail to grasp this. Because the message aimed at "outsiders" is not always understood by brethren, the Herald of Truth ministry is sometime misunderstood.

HOW CAN WE HELP BRETHREN UNDERSTAND THAT THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM THROUGH MASS COMMUNICATION REQUIRES US TO SPEAK TO PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE IN TERMS THEY UNDERSTAND?

There were fifty-seven alternatives suggested for the solution of this problem. Several alternatives proposed were duplicated. A number were similar to other alternative solutions proposed.

From an analysis of the alternatives suggested, the following report has been prepared. It is offered with the expectation God will be able to use us all to effect needed change by which our outreach with the gospel can become more effective through mass media communication.

The data indicated we face a problem of communication with our brethren. We need to provide them with opportunities to receive the programs over local stations. Our programs themselves can communicate that "the gospel is for all" by use of multi-racial talent.

The same principles used in communicating with outsiders must be used when speaking with our brethren. All attempts to deal with this problem should proceed so as to "speak to brethren about this problem where they are, in language they can understand.

Attempts to communicate with our brethren so they can understand and support our use of mass media should be the object of concentrated effort. It was stated, "we've communicated need for funds--but do brethren really know 'where people are' in the world--what and how they think?"

Before this communication is begun, it was suggested an effort be made to "clearly define objectives" of what we are trying to do in this ministry. Those objectives could be communicated through "Key Men" in various brotherhood gatherings. Further, those objectives could be communicated through articles prepared for publication.

There was emphasis upon better use of brotherhood journals to explain the nature of evangelism through mass communication media. Special Issues of such publications could focus upon this theme.

The effort to overcome this problem should seek to demonstrate the validity of this approach in evangelism. The aim would be to "help brethren to admit their ignorance and need of understanding mass media." When that has been accomplished we could proceed to "teach brethren to understand the media."

Our first step toward this goal would need to be recognition of the difficulty of our task. We then should make brethren aware of communication theory and its implication for evangelism. It would be helpful to "remind brethren of their own diverse backgrounds," in seeking to facilitate understanding of the meaning of communicating with people "where they are." It was suggested we make it clear that "'preaching' relevant to ourselves" is something to be avoided when seeking to reach people who differ from us.

This effort should seek to make brethren aware of the point that mass media communication functions best for "contact" rather than for "conversion." In doing this, it would be important to show this is a Biblical concept. Further, the stress should be made that adapting a message to the needs of an audience "works," but it is "only a part of a larger process."

Brethren should be made aware of the things Jesus did in "reaching men where they are;" that Jesus used "diversified approaches." These principles of Jesus have modern illustrations which should be presented. In showing how we need to adapt our messages to the audience we would be identifying with what Jesus did, as in the parables.

As the communication of these principles is initiated, it was suggested an effort be made first to communicate with elders, to "start at the top." Further, steps should be taken to enlist preachers to help in an "awareness" program. Further, the "endorsement by preachers and other influential brethren" was suggested a step toward helping our brethren understand the necessity of using mass communication media in a different manner than we have been doing. Those who understand the principle could begin to speak of it from the pulpit.

After elders and preachers have begun to grasp the need for different approaches, it would be important to provide special materials for entire congregations. This might be in the form of a kit for "Using Mass Communication Media in Evangelism." Such a kit could contain films, printed material, etc. The film could include "two or more five minute presentations to be shown without prior comment to different brotherhood groups--one using good principles of audience adaptation--the other using poor techniques (over-persuasive, ignoring needs, etc.) and then ask for evaluation of group." This would be an attempt which seeks to permit the group itself to sense the need for good principles of using mass media in evangelism.

The congregational kit could also include statistical information pointing to successful efforts in evangelism involving mass media. By focusing upon cases of conversion where mass media had a part, a proper stress could be placed upon the process required. The testimony of converts would be helpful at this point. We should allow them to "explain to brethren how they were reached (note how many conversions came through other recently converted people)."

This emphasis upon conversions would lend itself to a suggested self-study within the congregation of recent converts. From their own experience they would be able to discover how there is a "process" extending over a period of time in which people are led to Christ.

The intent of this effort should be aimed also at helping brethren understand the reasons for their "likes and dislikes." In so doing an effort should be made to "implant real Christian attitudes," challenging them to "apply the golden rule, not to be judgmental, etc."

It was suggested an attempt be made to "use local people to inform less informed members" in regard to correct use of mass media in evangelism. The thought being people usually are made aware and have their interest stimulated by outside influences but when they make serious contemplation of change they need to be in contact with persons in whom they otherwise have confidence.

It would be helpful to "discover and publicize industry techniques." This could be done locally by contacting persons working in mass media. For example, one could use "appearances and statements by program directors" as to the effectiveness and quality of Herald of Truth programs."

Communication of the information to the congregation might well begin with informative bulletin articles. However, it should become an "intensive educational program." Such a program should "include more and more brethren in small group sessions to analyze, critique, and evaluate" evangelism through mass communication media. A word of caution was given that "small group sessions may not be for everyone - be sensitive to people's feelings."

One powerful suggestion was to encourage "outreach emphasis in the local church," where members would be involved in "outcast" evangelism. When Christians begin personal contact with people who normally don't attend our assemblies they will understand from personal experience why it is necessary to speak to people as they are where they are in order to be understood by them.

Moving beyond the congregational level, it was suggested use be made of lectureships and workshops where speakers could inform on the principles of evangelism using mass media. An example of this was given of the class at ACC this year on "Creative Use of Radio."

In working with our brethren, the counsel was given to "seek support from people with no vested interest." In other words, seek the backing of brethren who are willing for those using the opportunity to utilize it effectively, even if it may be misunderstood by some. The caution was given, "be wise and expedient in avoiding needless controversy," but "deal appropriately with antagonists" and "don't over-react to criticisms."