

## CHAPTER 8

### COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

**Mrs Bongi Moyo-Bango**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Unit has been functioning for a year and a few months, since reopening in April 2009, and although some achievements have been made, a lot of work still needs to be done. *The New Dimension* newspaper celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, and as we celebrate this major milestone, questions are being raised as to its relevance to the church at this point in time. Ineffective communication within the Connexion is at an all time high and this undermines the very values of connectedness that we aspire to.

#### THE UNIT

The unit still has a staff compliment of only two people, which is insufficient for the kind of work we need to be doing. We are the journalists, writers, editors, proofreaders, designers, bookkeepers, packers and distributors of the paper. We have expended most of our energies on the paper mainly because it is impossible to do all that we have to do well without the necessary resources.

A new webmaster has been contracted to improve the website and make it more interactive, relevant and up to date.

Last year we requested that the district bishops appoint interested people to the position of District Press Officer, but so far we know of only three that were actually appointed. Unfortunately, only one of those, the press officer from the Natal Coastal District, has been active. We have since written to the bishops again, and hope to train the press officers (who will ensure that we are kept up to date with everything happening around the Connexion) in November of this year. This is likely to improve the relevance of our tools of communication.

#### STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING

At a day-long strategic planning meeting held in July, it was decided that *The New Dimension* has possibly outlived its relevance and purpose, and that the low subscriber rates and print runs are due to this. It was then decided that a new publication tool needs to be launched – the form and structure of which is yet to be decided. We are in the process of trying to find a new name for this publication. The need for a written publication to compliment cyber communication goes without saying, as the bulk of the Connexion does not have access to a computer, let alone the Internet.

The possibility of out-sourcing the new publication is also being looked into as a means to becoming more viable and self-sustaining. This would mean a higher print run, more advertising, a bulkier paper and a minimal cost to the unit and subscribers. It would also give the present staff time to actually find good material for the publication, market it, and do other communication and information related work, such as taking care of our archives, building training resources, and putting together knick-knacks and information packages for visitors and for when we travel outside

the Connexion. At present we have a print run of ±10 000, which is really a drop in the ocean for a Connexion that has over 3 million members.

## **SETA ACCREDITATION**

The unit is in the process of acquiring SETA accreditation so that we can offer training courses to the church, and make some money for the unit in the process. This is a long process that can take upwards of a year to complete and a consultant who deals with this SETA accreditation has been hired to see the process through.

## **WORLD METHODIST CONFERENCE**

As you are all aware, we will be hosting the World Methodist Conference in August next year (2011). In honour of this great occasion, the Communications Unit, in consultation and cooperation with the Mission Unit, will be producing a magazine that will highlight the major projects within the Connexion. This will be a once-off publication and will be given to all the delegates at the conference as part of their information package. This will be good publicity for the Connexion, and will hopefully lead to new links and partnerships that will be beneficial to all.

## **BRANDING**

There has been grave concern about our MCSA brand. It was noted that a lot of groups, on Facebook for example, are using our logo and masquerading as the official MCSA group without the actual knowledge or consent of the leadership of the church. Also, the church has received a lot of bad publicity in the last couple of years. Because of this, it was decided that a re-branding exercise is needed. We have listened to presentations from branding companies and decided on one, *Agile Solutions*, to help us sort out our branding issues, which are essentially communication issues. We are in the process of establishing what the issues are before we prioritise them and begin the process of taking back our brand and making it even better. Creating official forums through which the church can communicate effectively will be one such venture. This process will be rolled out over a few years.

## **Finances**

The Unit is still under a lot of financial strain, mainly caused by the fact that most of our subscribers do not pay their subscriptions on time. We have had to stop sending to some circuits that have bills ranging between R8 000 and R16 000, and now we have the additional task of acting as debt collectors. We are therefore now encouraging advance payments for the paper. Revenue made from advertising is minimal (±R8 000 in a 'good' month and ±R4 000 in a 'bad' month) as very few organisations are willing to advertise in a publication that has a print run of less than 30 000 every month. The advertising revenue should really be what carries the paper, but the reality is that it doesn't make a dent on our postage and printing which cost approximately R4 000 and R13 000 a month respectively, depending on the number of pages in the paper. Five half-page adverts or ten quarter-page adverts would carry not only the cost of postage and printing, but also enable us to produce a bulkier publication.

## **THE FUTURE...**

2011 will see the launch of a new publication which will hopefully have the buy in and support of a wider spectrum of the Connexion and thus make it more viable as a communication tool. We are also anticipating higher use of our improved website, and greater information sharing through an E-newsletter which will be mailed to our subscribers weekly. On the whole we anticipate a year of greater, more effective and inclusive communication.