

Radio Programming Roles

Chapter 1 - All Fourteen Roles
by Frank Gray



Introduction

This booklet comprises in a single volume all roles listed in the first chapter of *Radio Programming Roles* (2nd edition). Alternatively the roles can be read in three separate parts. Other chapters of the book are also published as stand-alone chapters in their own right.

It should be considered as an introduction to the various roles. They are explored in detail in the remaining three parts of Chapter 1. Alternatively they can be read as one single volume.

The other chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Part 1: Roles Summarised
- Chapter 1 – Part 2: Appealing to a Wider Audience (roles 1-4)
- Chapter 1 – Part 3: For Middle Distance Listeners (roles 5-10)
- Chapter 1 – Part 4: Other Useful Roles (roles 11-14)
- Chapter 2 – The Gray Matrix
- Chapter 3 – Dimensions of the Message
- Chapter 4 – Incarnational Radio
- Chapter 5 – Finding Answers
- Chapter 6 – Using New Technology

The entire book is not yet available in printed form but the whole contents can be found on the Web at <http://radiatoroles.com>.

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1 All Fourteen Roles

Role 1 - INFORMATION

News and Current Affairs

Most people tune in their radios to hear the latest news. The integrity of radio stations is often measured by the quality of their informational programming — the better their news coverage, the greater their credibility. Throughout the world, there are societies where news is suppressed or manipulated by corrupt or authoritarian regimes. Large numbers of people are eager to find alternative broadcasters who reach out to them, and satisfy their need for trustworthy and objective coverage of local and world events.

In meeting this need, purely as an act of service alone, Christian radio stations attract significantly wider audiences. But much more than that — Christian broadcasters thus place themselves squarely in the arena of contemporary history. News is history in the making — and God is the author of history. His purposes, and His truths, abound in the unfolding global drama of news and current affairs.

Christian news broadcasters thus demonstrate Christian concern for life and the world around them. This is a dynamic part of the Gospel that relates to everyday life.

When a Christian fails to take note of the world around him — locally and globally — he is in effect saying that the message of the Gospel has nothing to say to the contemporary world. This does a profound disservice to the Gospel. Christian stations lose their penetration when they delude themselves into thinking that their programming need not relate to news events. They lose out on vast potential audiences who would never tune into Christian stations purely to hear Bible teaching. Yet such non-believers are drawn to listen when they hear Christian programs present trustworthy, interesting and illuminating coverage of the events which shape the world they live in.

This has two implications for Christian broadcasters. First, we need to select our news topics with discernment, and treat them editorially with great care. We should not report events in a way that exalts worldly values. We should *interrogate* raw secular material to filter out bias, prejudice and false assumptions. We should not necessarily accept the approach to a news event adopted by the secular media — a Christian perspective is necessary. This is particularly relevant to secular stories that dwell on salacious detail, or obsessively see news events through political and material eyes, at the expense of the human dimension.

In Christian news journalism, the biblical watchword is *test everything* with spiritual as well as professional discernment. Done conscientiously and well, news-related contributions to programming have a sharp cutting edge. News programming graphically portrays situations and events where, in real life, God is at work and also where Satan's prevailing influence is evident. News analysis can interface directly with Bible teaching, or — at a pre-evangelism level — simply highlight Kingdom values instead of those of a fallen world. Effective Christian news journalism should be directed towards engaging real life situations throughout society, yet with a Christian perspective.

In these days of mobile phones listeners can be encouraged to provide their own on-the-spot reporting whenever there is breaking news. For local stations this may be from the scene of

disasters or serious accidents. The immediacy of such reporting far outweighs any technical shortcomings.

For international broadcasts, however, it may not always be practical or advisable to air straight news programs. This is pointed out by FEBC's Chinese broadcasters who have elected to take a comparatively conservative but safe stand towards newscasting. They avoid doing news broadcasts but they make strong efforts to integrate news and information into their other programs that are closely linked with their audience.

News eloquently tells the story of a fallen, sinful world. By doing so it provides a ready platform for the Gospel — the Good News.

Illustrations

The program *Opening Up* produced by FEBC Hong Kong draws on stories from newspapers and magazines and then interacts and comments on them. Because there is considerable time difference between the time of production and broadcast, they have only been able to make use of soft news. Meanwhile *Free Cafe* produced in the Singapore studio package their perspectives towards current affairs in a free and relaxing style.

In order to solve the problem of timeliness, the Hong Kong studio developed a "near-live broadcasts" which are relayed to the transmitting station via the Internet. By this means they were able to address the outbreak of the Asian financial turmoil in 1997. They were immediately able to comment on the current situation in the program *The Caring Network* then putting it on air within a few days.

Discussion Questions

- Where do your listeners go to find their news?
- What limitations are placed upon you for delivering news programs?
- In what creative ways might you cover current events and topics of discussion without carrying regular news bulletins?

Role 2 – ENTERTAINMENT

Enjoyment and Relaxation

Along with news and information, entertainment is the most obvious and popular role of radio.

Programs with music, humour, human interest, drama and other forms bring entertainment into the kitchen, bedroom, office, department store, car — even the paddy field — inexpensively.

Some might immediately doubt whether Christians should be thinking about entertainment. But consider this: communications practitioners in health promotion and community development know that if their key message is wrapped with a layer of entertainment it is far more effective. Listeners pay greater attention to it, remember it, and are more likely to act upon it. Development communicators use *edutainment* communication techniques, where entertainment and education or information is blended in a radio program.

Every program should have entertainment value if the listener is to stay tuned. By that we mean that it should be enjoyable. At a minimum, this means the program is well-produced. More than that, it should provide something to raise the listener's spirit and satisfy his more aesthetic needs. Isn't it interesting to note that when God created trees he not only made them functional (providing fruit, materials for building, etc.) but also pleasing to the eye so that we might enjoy them?

Let's take a brief look at the main areas of entertainment: music, popular culture, human interest and humour.

Music

Music has the ability to raise the human spirit and minister to it at a level that words alone cannot do. It creates an effect or atmosphere to support a few carefully selected words that potentially have greater impact than a lengthy monologue. Certain kinds of music are especially valuable in raising the human spirit, warming the heart, softening the emotions and calming fears. All these need to be seen as accomplishing a part of what we are seeking to do as Christian broadcasters. We also need to recognise that there are many genres of music appealing both to different age groups and different musical tastes. Talking about the Gospel could follow naturally on from many kinds of music.

We, however, recognise that in talking about music we enter a minefield of potential controversy. Tastes in music, not least Christian music, differ so widely. What constitutes good music for one person may be the devil's music for another. Apart from certain theological issues no other area of Christian interest causes more controversy or division. FEBC has therefore drawn up guidelines¹ (rather than rules) which help describe what factors need to be considered in selecting music for our programs.

The key to successful music programs largely depends on two broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of the intended audience and their musical tastes, and (2) the program

¹ FEBC Music Guidelines can be found in Appendix C

producer/presenter having both a broad working knowledge/appreciation of music and a commitment to Christian values. Station management needs to provide strong support for producers of music programs. Their music selections will most certainly come under fire from segments of the Christian community who may not approve and may feel their financial support appears to be going to waste. This is especially true of programs attempting to reach a contemporary audience.

Yet, even in more traditional cultures Christian broadcasters have seen the need for playing popular music as an expression of their identification with their listeners and their desire to meet their needs. Having a good understanding of the listener's tastes in music goes a long way to building bridges of trust and understanding.

Popular Culture

The term *popular culture* refers to those creative, artistic, activities that people engage in for relaxation and entertainment. These include, for example, books and magazines, travel, sport, music, movies/videos, visual art such as drama, paintings and fashion (e.g. clothing).

Radio can address these and cover them through book or movie reviews and discussion or interviews with the creative talent associated with them. If the facilities are available, outside (remote) recordings or live broadcasts can be made of productions taking place in the community.

Productions promoting values that contradict the Gospel should only be used for illustrative purposes, and only after careful thought as to the implications for local believers, and the likely response from listeners and authorities. FEBC's music guidelines might also be used to provide direction for programs addressing popular culture issues.

Special care needs to be exercised when music with lyrics from a foreign language, usually English, is used. Quite often objectionable words are used or sentiments expressed of a sexual nature which violate our Christian principles.

Human interest

People who tell real stories from real life are a wonderful gift. Our experience is that, too often, they are overlooked. We forget that everyone has stories to tell – and people love to tell them. They reflect the heart of the people, their history, and the things that are important to them. These stories are part of the fabric of the community. Christian broadcasters all too frequently stay inside the studio and fail to get out among the people they are talking to through their programs. Presenters, too, by telling their own stories come across as real, believable people themselves - imperfect, having problems of their own, while learning to cope with many of the same challenges as their listeners.

All over the world, the most effective radio programs, apart from music and news, are those that give insights into ordinary and not-so-ordinary people. They talk about their lives, the things that make them laugh or cry, their hopes and despairs, their failures and their victories. Often these stories can be used without comment and do not need to have any explicit Christian content at all, although they may illustrate Christian values.

Different formats such as interviews, discussion, stories, biographical books or sketches can bring people into programs. A major format is drama that recreates daily life and projects the listener into a participatory experience. The listener interacts with drama rather than remaining a recipient of information. He identifies with characters and situations, experiencing them without feeling threatened. Christian values such as love and forgiveness are much more effectively modelled through drama than verbally talked about or explained. Traditional dramatic forms can often be easily adapted into the radio medium.

Humour

The light-hearted side to radio can do more than demonstrate that Christians can have fun and enjoy life. Those who know how to use humour skilfully and appropriately can communicate truth effectively. Humour is culture-bound, so we need to appreciate that humour is, in most circumstances, best performed by those who know their own culture.

Cartoons often provide humorous insights into daily life through the use of graphics. They make the absurdity of familiar practices and opinions become apparent so that we can see them more objectively. We might explore ways of cultivating audio versions of the cartoon in an attempt to reveal truth about ourselves, our culture and society. Wit can be quite incisive if used carefully and intelligently. Sadly much of the wit that Jesus used in his teaching is overlooked by most of us because of our lack of understanding of the Jewish culture at that time and the current talking points of the day.

Illustrations

FEBC's Vietnamese service started its broadcast every day with a 5-minute human interest story that listeners could relate to. It did not have any explicit Christian content but focused on a topic of general interest taken from everyday life.

Discussion questions

- What kinds of popular entertainment work well in your culture?
- What cultural forms of entertainment might you be able to adapt for radio?
- Have you tried experimenting with new kinds of entertaining programs? Do you know of Christian entertainers whom you might be able to work with?
- How about simple story telling? A story told well can hold an audience..

Role 3 - INSTRUCTION

Functioning as Teachers

Radio is a marvellous medium for instructing, or providing advice where needed, especially where listeners are spread over a wide area. Radio has been used to teach listeners about agriculture and health, and to gain skills in science, mathematics, learning a foreign language and a wide range of other subjects. In one case radio was even used to teach students how to draw, and it was found to be more effective than a television program on the same topic!

In the Christian radio context, instruction programs fall into two broad categories: social development and Christian education.

Social Development

Community development is the process of enabling communities to identify, plan and implement action to change and improve their living and environment.

Why should the Christian broadcaster involve himself in community development programs when his main interest lies in spreading the Gospel?

There are many ways we could answer this. We could look at our definition of the Gospel or our understanding of the Kingdom of God. We could look at the Scripture records of how God and Jesus concerned themselves with the well-being of people. We could take the view that as we have freely received so we should freely pass on to others who are less privileged. We could justify it on the basis of our responsibility to the community and meeting the felt needs of those around us. It is a good way of saying we care and serve our listeners. Or we could say that it is simply a good way of attracting listeners

The point is that Christian radio has a role here. This type of programming demonstrates our concern for the well-being of our listeners as well as reflecting a Christian world-view. When we do this we earn the right to be heard in matters of more direct Christian significance. Community development programming can have a direct relationship to church growth as shown in Africa.

The aims of community development are to involve, motivate and instruct the community to take part in their social, economic, physical, and spiritual development. Participatory programs in which listeners contribute to the purpose, design, and content of programs, help link listeners to community leaders and others who can provide functional information. It also gives communities a "voice" to express their views and desire for change. Read more about this under Advocacy (Role 4)

Programs can educate people who cannot afford the education or training they need. They have neither the time nor opportunity to attend classes, or maybe there is a lack of teachers or other resources. Programs can supplement or complement what is already being taught in classes. Radio is widely used for educational programs for schools and universities.

Functional information helps listeners in their work, life and family. We can cover important issues relating to human rights, conflict resolution, tolerance, understanding, citizenship and cultural values. Health and agriculture programs are obvious topics for us in many of our broadcast fields. Radio is especially useful in times of national emergencies such as disasters where rapid and specific information is needed. Other types of instruction might include topics such as computing.

Radio can also play a vital role in building bridges of understanding between communities where there is a history of tension and conflict. Much of it is fuelled by ignorance or by misrepresentation of the facts. Good teaching, sensitively prepared and presented, can do much to break down barriers of distrust.

Study programs that teach the English language are popular. Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) by Christian broadcasters remains a field of largely untapped potential. With newly emerging economies (such as Vietnam) rapidly trying to catch up with the rest of the world we find a great hunger for learning English. Programs in specialised English² have also begun to make an impact. These programs use a limited vocabulary and also the delivery is limited to 70 words per minute in order to aid comprehension.

We do, however, need to exercise caution as teaching English can be viewed as a form of cultural imperialism. This is the view in China where listeners often associate the Gospel with foreign cultural invasion. They think Christianity is a Western import and teaching English is another means of subverting them.

We may even find opportunities to work alongside government projects or as part of a government campaign. In some countries that are closed to the Gospel, supplying educational programs or providing training to produce them, may be ways of building and establishing credibility.

The use of radio for community development is a specialist area and training modules have been developed to help program staff do it well.

Christian Education

Christian radio programs provide practical teaching at relatively low cost - especially because believers are motivated to listen. This is true of believers in closed countries. But even in open country situations, such as the Philippines, radio is a valuable tool for bringing low-cost Christian education to those who cannot afford to leave home to attend a Bible School.

a. For unbelievers

We should not assume that there are large numbers of unbelievers interested in studying the Bible as we know group Bible study. However, we may be surprised to discover that there are

² *Spotlight* is a 15-minute English program sensitively made for international audiences whose first language is not English. It uses a 1500 word core vocabulary. For more information and free programs to download visit the Spotlight web-site at <http://www.spotlightradio.org>

significant numbers who are curious to find out more about Jesus Christ, Christian belief and the teachings of the Bible. We'll look at this a little more in the role of Apologetics.

A key issue is *how* we teach the Bible and Christian truth. What creative ways can be developed to interest the listener enough to make them want to come back for more? How can we talk about things that interest them? At the same time are we anxious to help them find very practical help in our guidebook, the Bible? In some instances it may be better strategy to use the radio program as a means of whetting their appetite. For example, use the program to promote a Bible correspondence course so that the listener can be put on the road of studying and discovering the Bible for himself. Or it may mean using a culturally appropriate form for teaching — such as a Buddhist-style chant as is used in one country.

b. For believers

Instruction for believers is easier for Christian producers to produce because we are in familiar territory and have a ready audience. The common mistake, however, is that we overlook the creative side. The time of broadcast, the style and the content together, sometimes suggest that we expect listeners to be doing serious Bible study while eating their breakfast!

Any teaching of Christians should be based on observed needs, depending on the circumstances. In situations where there is restricted access, such as China, Christians are left with little trained leadership, few Bibles, and are vulnerable to heresy and cultic practices. A priority might be a solid grounding in the basics of the faith and the practical side of running a church fellowship. It might also include pastoral counselling and learning new songs. Serious consideration needs to be given to social issues and how to address them: family counselling, environmental issues, coping with stress, financial management and in general about a Christian's social responsibility in society.

Illustrations

In one Asian country, several churches were planted due to an agricultural program that contained no religious content or reference to Christianity. Farmers began listening to Christian programs before and after the agriculture program. A local pastor reported that he was now welcome in the farmers' community because he was known as the friend of the program producer. As part of a co-ordinated, balanced, program schedule community development programs can have a significant impact.

The classic example of this has been the long-standing Bible School curriculum that has been taught to Christians in China since 1980. After careful research and planning the 3-year Village Bible School (VBS) was put on-air on both medium- and short-wave for two hours each night. Four courses were taught at the rate of three lessons per week and repeated the following evening. Literature and cassette materials used to maximise the teaching were distributed inside China to those who enrolled. After two cycles VBS was upgraded to a 4-year course under the name of *Voice of Friendship Seminary (VFS)*.

Discussion Questions

- What particular learning opportunities would your listeners like to be given?
- What specific subjects are they anxious to learn about?
- Which of these could you teach creatively by radio?
- Who could you partner with to produce a high quality teaching program

Role 4 - ADVOCACY

Agents of Change in a Broken World

Advocacy in the context of radio is when the radio station/broadcaster takes up a position on behalf of listeners. It then conducts a campaign on their behalf, or for their benefit, to improve their environment, their health and welfare, their living conditions and circumstances. It is championing a cause.

Jesus showed us how. He provided a practical, working model during his three years of public ministry. He showed us how to engage the outcasts, lift up the fallen, heal the sick and showed great respect for women. By so doing he challenged many of the social norms of his day – things that were out-of-line with the Kingdom of God. He is also our advocate with the Father.

The underlying concerns are for justice on the one hand and compassion on the other. When we combine these two we find a place for advocacy among the many roles of the Christian broadcaster.

Community or local radio in particular lends itself to advocacy in social development. It is a natural fit and can do much to remove prejudice through thoughtful research and strong persuasion.

But what is advocacy in practical terms? An advocate according to the dictionary (OED) is “a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy.” How can radio programming be used for this?

There is so much injustice and poverty around us that we don't need to look far to find things that need to be changed for the good of the community. We might begin by asking what issues are of concern in the community. Is it safe water? Or refuse/rubbish disposal? AIDS/HIV? Drugs? Teenage pregnancy? Alcohol abuse? Road safety? Unemployment? We could make a very long list of possibilities. What is the hot issue that people are talking about?

Very often these issues affect the poor rather than the middle class. But the poor don't normally have a voice nor do they have the influence or contacts to make their concerns known. Radio can give them that voice. More than that, those who are affected can also be encouraged to make their own programs.

Radio programming can be used to heighten awareness of the issue, by talking to people who are suffering from its effects. The program can be used to first explore the nature of the problem – and how well is it understood. What are its causes? People will share various opinions. Get them talking. But also include those who have the power to bring about changes and put solutions into action. Radio can provide the forum for these kinds of public discussions.

Mass media, and especially radio, can make things happen when they serve as advocates for change. They do this best by raising awareness of critical issues in society, by initiating change and being used to resolve conflict.

Alternative media offer a lot by giving minorities a voice, addressing issues of relevance to them that may not be covered in mainstream or official media. Alternatively they can do it by producing programs that bring such concerns to the attention of authorities and decision-makers. In different parts of the world this has successfully been achieved through participatory production strategies.

Participatory production encourages broadcasters to “give the microphone away” by encouraging listeners to speak for themselves and even produce their own programs.

Public service broadcasters have great potential for providing strategic information. Why? Because they provide an alternative to state-owned or commercial media, are impartial and are concerned for the whole person. Secular media are unlikely to be interested in much of what interests FEBC. Programs relating to new ideas, social movements and issues, politics, development or emerging trends, will facilitate the listeners' access to information, broaden their horizons and empower them to act.

Where governments are still exercising tight controls it may be difficult to address social issues in this same way. For example, in spite of China opening up its borders in many respects the government is basically politically motivated and is protective of its own powers, and its internal policies and procedures. The 2008 Olympics did much to present China in a good light to the rest of the world but it remains sensitive to overseas broadcasts and tries to keep them away from her people. Their strict Internet policies also illustrate this same fear of external influence. Christian broadcasters therefore have to be very careful under the current situation and for the good of the Gospel. In order to safeguard their audience, FEBC's policy has been to stay away from direct reference to social issues within China. A practical alternative might be to discuss the problems that other countries might be having - and let the listener make the connection.

On local stations, and in practical terms, advocacy might be used as a radio component in a community health program, showing people how to adopt new remedies, or medicines. Or it may provide the community a voice in helping get clean water, or in regular garbage collection. It could be used to help in creating HIV/AIDS awareness among young people, or in helping reduce the number of adults smoking. For many having a radio campaign raises awareness and also adds credibility especially when endorsed by well-known personalities.

Engaging social issues in this way, if handled carefully, could put local radio stations on-side with government agencies if the station partners with the government by providing a media component. Many governments do not have the media expertise to do so themselves and state broadcasters often lack the motivation or experience.

Chapter 4 on Incarnational Radio addresses radio's usefulness in Community Development and includes further insights into the use of advocacy in social change.

Illustrations

The Philippines provides a media environment appropriate to this kind of treatment. In Mindanao station DXFE in Davao started a national outcry against offensive daytime TV viewing by inviting listeners to the station to sign a petition. The response was overwhelming. Soon station manager Arnel Tan had enough names to take to the Davao civic leaders, challenging them to take action. This attracted the attention of the wider news media and soon reached the attention of leaders in Manila. It resulted in the TV program being dropped from the schedule.

FEBC's Chinese broadcasters feel it necessary to hold back and restrain themselves from freely talking about related topics. However, there are many social issues and Gospel broadcasts

may highlight these and the actions that should be taken by believers in the name of care. For example, the Angels of Justice Action in 1998 highlighted one of their trials. Though it did not exert great influence on society, audience letters showed that they greatly supported a similar stance and the suggestions offered. This on-air campaign advocated action to stop injustice in society.

Discussion Questions

- Are you involved in broadcasting to a happy community? Or are there issues in the community that rumble on and which need to be talked about and discussed?
- What can you do as a Christian broadcaster to show your love and concern by engaging in some of these issues? In what ways will you "bless" your community by helping them find solutions to the problems they face?

Role 5 - POSITIONING

Promoting Awareness of Christian Social Concern and Action

The world needs to hear of the love and compassion that Christians are demonstrating in daily life in very practical ways.

All over the world Christian humanitarian organizations are actively involved in relieving human suffering and providing hope for the needy. This is not just in community development projects — providing water, education, agriculture, health, refugee relief, rehabilitation services — but in other ways too. Local churches are often involved in their own community while Christians in their own professional fields engage in worthy projects, motivated and influenced by their Christian principles.

Sadly, the world largely does not hear about these things. Often, they remain ignorant and maintain their negative stereotypical attitudes toward Christians and churches. When they do realise that they are seeing or receiving Christian love in action, there is a positive change in attitude and response. Misconceptions are often corrected and stereotypes of Christians have to be put aside.

Sometimes we may be both surprised and encouraged by the observations of secular journalists. Notable was an article in *The Times* entitled *As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God*. While describing himself as "a confirmed atheist" Matthew Parris writes:

*I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changed people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.*³

We radio producers have a distinct duty to position Christianity and its adherents in this way. It not only changes the attitudes of those who may be antagonistic, but encourages, inspires and empowers believers when they hear of the good works their fellow believers are doing elsewhere.

Our programs can focus on topics or issues that draw attention to what Christians are doing in society.

Illustrations

The *Caring Angel* program for China presents the ministries of several international Christian organizations. Christians have voluntarily taken up responsibilities that should have been taken up by governments. By so doing they have presented a loving witness to the Chinese audience. At the same time they have corrected past propaganda that criticised foreign missionaries. In the VFS course Church History in China they made positive comments about the missionaries'

³ *The Times*, Dec 27 2008.

contributions to China. Similar information was also broadcast in an evangelistic program to help non-believers to get a correct understanding towards the contributions made by Christians in society.

Some Christian development agencies such as World Vision have produced programs that feature what they have been doing. This gives them publicity but, more importantly, also helps us demonstrate as a body the concern and love that Christians are translating into action. It also serves as a complementary function to a words-and-sound-only ministry like radio.

Discussion Questions

- Can you think of a church-based initiative that you get excited about and would like to promote?
- Do you know of another Christian ministry that could benefit greatly by having greater public exposure through a radio program?
- What good works are Christians doing that others are not doing? How might you come alongside them and assist them through a partnership with radio?

Role 6 - INSPIRATION

Providing Friendship and Hope

Radio stations, particular programs, or their presenters can easily become friends to our listeners. They are always there as part of a person's daily routine of familiar voices and serve to bring a measure of regularity to a person's life. Warm and friendly voices provide daily nourishment and a sense of stability. They also build trust and hope for a better world.

Any radio station anywhere has the capacity for doing this, but this special relationship takes on even greater significance for people living under totalitarian governments or suffering persecution. It also extends to people confined to their homes through ill-health or old age, or isolated from needed church fellowship.

FEBC's radio ministry was launched in 1945 in the wake of the widespread turmoil and destruction in Asia brought about by World War II. Hardly before FEBC could get organised, China was enveloped by communism. Russia had already succumbed some thirty years earlier, and within the next thirty years the countries of Indochina were to follow. In other parts of Southeast Asia some listeners were living under the oppression of Islam.

A very significant part of the Christian's witness is to bring hope and inspiration into a world that looks increasingly gloomy and dark. The birth of Jesus brought light to those who walked in darkness - and so must we. It was clear to the founders of FEBC that its mandate, from the beginning, was to minister to those in 'closed' countries. This required providing inspiration and hope to those denied freedom under totalitarian governments. Inspiration in turn leads to companionship and friendship and a special relationship develops between listener and broadcaster.

No one knew how successful FEBC's inspirational ministry to China had been until the country emerged from behind the Bamboo Curtain in the late 1970s. The impact of that inspirational role of Christian radio, especially during the days of the Cultural Revolution, began to surface.

But this role does not only apply to those living under totalitarian governments. Today there is little cause for hope anywhere. As this is being written wars continue, terrorism is rampant on many fronts, economic gloom fills many columns of newspapers. Unemployment is rising as uncertainty spreads in the business world. Regardless of political and religious systems we have an important role in offering hope that extends beyond economic prosperity. Such hope is at the heart of the Gospel. Christian hope is not a warm fuzzy but something that is deeply rooted in the trials and tribulations of everyday living. And it works!

This process of bringing hope and encouragement depends as much on the presenter's attitudes as by the content itself. Certain program types, however, lend themselves especially to this application. Devotional programs come to mind. For China it was the daily devotional program *Streams in the Desert* (named after the book of the same name) which became a great source of inspiration — to Christian and non-Christian alike. For the Russians it was the familiar voice of Jack Koziol bringing encouragement from the Bible that saw them through their darkest hours.

Such hope is demonstrated by the self-giving love and sacrifice of individuals caring for one another in the face of adversity. It tells stories of courage and bravery, survival in the face of oppression and despair. It records accounts of heroes and those who have fought against the odds and won. It contains interviews with those who have come through hardship - or of those who face hardship daily with a brave face and a determination to win, whatever the cost.

It tells the story of the Cross and the loving, suffering and compassionate Christ who has gone that way before and has left us a memorable example to follow.

Illustrations

The Chinese broadcasts of FEBC are named *Liangyou* and *Yiyou* (literally, *Good Friend* and *Helpful Friend*). To their audiences, they are their good and helpful friends. Analysis of audience letters and interviews showed that the friendly attitude of their presenters was attractive to their audience. Their broadcasts compared well with the yelling and propagandist style of broadcasts in the past in the mainland. They were, however, losing this edge because in time many other Chinese stations successfully attracted audiences through similar soft touch broadcasts.

Currently during the midnight period they air an evangelistic program *Light A Lamp* with an unusual tone. Its popularity is partly because program hosts express care and encouragement rather than sermonizing. By so doing, the audience feels their loving care and so get to know to the love of God.

Discussion Questions

- How much hope and inspiration do you share with your listeners?
- Is it tied to the practical realities of daily living?
- Do you encourage your listeners to tell their stories? Do you look for people who have stories to tell that will inspire others?

Role 7 - WITNESS

Pointing to God's Presence and Activities

This is God's world. That is the main point we want to make. It does not belong to Satan — although that is the appearance given. Those who live according to the Kingdom of God are those who live *right-side up* in an upside down and fallen world.

The apostle Paul writing to the church in Rome⁴ states that the things of God are to be plainly seen. We are called to be witnesses to this truth. While it is obvious to us, it is not shared by the unbeliever who has a different world-view and interpretation of life. As media people, a large part of our job is to help people discover this truth for themselves, to help people to see. In these days of increased scepticism and competing philosophies and belief systems we may find ourselves reflecting these truths through words coupled with deeds of kindness.

The question is *how*? Telling of how God has worked in the lives of individuals, or even communities, is one of the most compelling ways of doing this. Listeners can readily identify with those whose stories and testimonies bring the Gospel down to earth. FEBC's files are filled with stories of listeners whose lives have been changed — often quite dramatically. We sometimes hear of whole communities that have been changed as a result of becoming Christian.

True stories go over well on radio. A news or documentary format might be the most suitable. Personal testimonies might require more sensitive treatment in order to respect the individual's privacy. Where human rights are ignored in certain situations, we need to guard their security.

Stories can cover far more than simply telling of how individuals came to faith, or how their lives have been changed. They can also tell of coping with problems in business, financial difficulties, healed relationships – or physical healing.

Another possibility is through documentaries on nature topics, to help people see the hand of God in nature and that there is a different way of interpreting the natural world.

Witness of such kind should not be confined to natural science: we can also give testimonies of God's sovereignty in disciplines such as the social sciences. We will not convince people to come to Christ through knowledge, but instead use that as guidance toward knowing God.

Secular radio and TV programs sometimes suggest that there is a “force” at work but they avoid talk of God, because that implies a moral responsibility.

We can do something about this. Award-winning journalist Lee Strobel's fine book *The Case for a Creator*⁵ might provide a good basis for a robust program series. In that book Strobel interviews leading scientists and cosmologists presenting irrefutable evidence of the delicate balances of the created order. The book gives faith an immense boost as new findings emerge about the incredible complexity of the universe. At the same time he exposes the very flimsy

⁴ Romans ch 1:20

⁵ *The Case for a Creator*, Lee Strobel 2004 Zondervan. See also web site <http://www.leestrobel.com>

and often false evidence that supports Darwin's evolutionary theory which is now taught so widely as factual.

Very often in Asia, when people are faced with natural disasters or spectacular displays of the forces of nature, they ask, "Is God trying to tell us something?" This was the case in Indonesia when the Asian tsunami struck in 2004. In the Philippines the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 had a similar effect. People with a supernatural world-view tend to look for a deeper meaning behind these events, thus providing a window of opportunity for introducing the God of creation. Even man-made disasters can produce the same kind of questioning.

God also seems to reveal himself to people through dreams in many cultures. This is especially the case in the Middle East and N. Africa. Christian broadcasters therefore devote specific radio programs to explaining these dreams and what people are seeing and experiencing. There is an amazing consistency.

Illustrations

Christian radio broadcasting has made a profound impact on the Hmong people of China and Southeast Asia over a period of years. Hmong villagers would listen to FEBC broadcasts from Manila and decide to become Christian. Often a village would send a delegation to the capital, in search of a pastor or missionary who could lead him into the faith. In one such village five families at first decided to burn their demon paraphernalia and become Christians.

This later grew to thirteen families, then twenty-one. Because of this stand they decided to shake off their opium-smoking habit. For some villagers this meant being sent for rehabilitation. They also were released from the fear of the spirits which demanded that they constantly sacrificed their pigs and chickens to appease them.

As the Gospel began to make an impact on their lives the Christian villagers became more industrious — and this attracted further assistance from aid agencies. After a few years entire Hmong villages were transformed. They became economically productive and a living testimony to the Gospel. In later years these things were talked about on the air and became well-known throughout the Hmong communities in Laos and surrounding countries. It resulted in many more coming to faith.

Discussion Questions

- What evidence might you point to that supports the existence of God in the world today?
- Are there specific areas of interest that might appeal especially to segments of your audience?
- Do you know of Christian naturalists or other scientists who might be interested in working with you on programs of this kind?

Role 8 - APOLOGETIC

Comparing Christian Belief with Others

Christian belief rests on a very solid foundation of historical fact and documentation - unlike many other religions. It is therefore not difficult to defend.

It is therefore unfortunate that the English word *apologetic* is misleading. Its similarity to *apology* suggests that we have to make excuses for what we believe. This is not the case. The name stems from the first and second century Apologists (or *Defenders*) represented by Justin Martyr. These writers defended Christianity by both answering criticism directly and by setting out the truth of the Gospel in the framework of Greek philosophy.

The method Martyr employed was to seek common ground between the Gospel and current philosophy, and to build on that common ground a case for the superiority of Christian faith. Apologetics addresses itself to the task of making a rational presentation for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It appeals to the mind rather than the emotions. It challenges the presuppositions and foundations of prevailing belief and value systems by addressing their inadequacies and inconsistencies.

This does not mean that we develop a lot of highbrow programs for intellectuals. It does mean that we need to understand the world-view of our intended audience, so that we can consciously address aspects of their world-view that are inconsistent with the Gospel.

For example, for many years now the educational system of many countries has been brought into line with the teachings of an atheistic world-view. This system teaches that man is in control of his own destiny, that everything can be explained by science and rational thought. In communist and former communist countries we are appalled to discover societies characterised by a distinct absence of any set of underlying values — even in the area of ecology and the environment.

Individuals raised under communism learned to suppress their feelings and submit to the system. Their lives were controlled by fear and they learned to conform and not stand out from the rest. They looked out for themselves and their own good, while denying any appearance of behaviour associated with free society. Many societies have moved on as communism has collapsed and been replaced by more liberating elements of democracy.

It is not hard to see that the Gospel and Christian principles stand in direct opposition to many of these instilled values. Moreover, we know that God has made us in His image so that our spirits might respond to the higher order of life accorded to us by the Holy Spirit.

A Buddhist monk once wrote a lengthy letter to FEBC describing how the speaker's words captured his attention:

Slowly, I became convinced that there must be a Living God. As I continued to listen to the message, I became eager to know how he would interpret Anatta (all is vanity). He said, Nothing is under our control; man's desire is to rule and be the controller with this decaying physical body; but this futility is evident by the buried bodies of young and old at the cemetery. ... This physical realm we are in, is only temporal; we are not in control of anything.

But there is an eternal realm he said, where we can be immortal. We can live there forever. By believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His Grace, we can be saved. Saya quoted Bible verses and preached. I did not fully understand what it really meant at that time, but I was greatly touched. For us (Buddhists) it takes years of striving just to experience a fleeting peace of mind.

The approach is very reminiscent of Paul's address on Mars Hill⁶. Many, including this monk, have come to faith as a direct result.

Through careful programming we can help our listener to recognise and respond to these inner promptings, helping him to see that there is another way of looking at life. We need to reveal the inconsistencies of atheistic belief and its inadequacy to explain those God-given instincts of love and beauty that take us beyond a bottom-line human existence. We need to take the Living Word of God to them so that it comes alive in their lives.

Is it not important, therefore, to raise these issues with the listener so that he might see these things for himself? Should he not discover the inadequacy of teaching that leaves no place for our Creator God who equips us with a sense of beauty and a desire for love?

How does one introduce Jesus Christ to a cadre who has sought the communist dream for his whole life? This is a most urgent question we have to answer since many cadres have now reached the end of their lives.

But we should not limit our apologetics to addressing communism along with Buddhist, Islamic and Hindu belief systems. Today materialism provides a more sinister challenge since it appeals to man's desire for possessions and his innate greed. Addressing secular humanism requires that we understand it.

Advertisements for the worldwide Alpha Course⁷ ask *Is this life all there is?* They suggest that people may have everything they need materially, but still are empty. It is popular especially among the middle-aged. This age group includes many who have done well in business or in pursuing their vocation, but finally come to realise that they have still not found what they hoped life would deliver.

Post-modernism which now embraces much of the western world has a pervasive influence on society and the way people look at life. But more than that, we need to find creative ways of bringing secular men and women back to a recognition of the more important issues of life from which they are running away.

Illustrations

One FEBC program producer in a predominantly Buddhist country has gone to great lengths to relate to his own culture. He has studied hard to understand Buddhism by learning much of the Buddhist language (Pali). He never gives the impression that he is alienated from it or the culture that surrounds it. Standing in a Buddhist temple he recites with great detail the intricacies of Buddhism and how the system serves the community. This love of his own culture

⁶ Acts 17:22-32

⁷ <http://alpha.org>

combined with his working knowledge of Buddhist religious language (and consequent understanding of Buddhism) has done much to make him a master at relating to his listeners — particularly monks and those intimately acquainted with the teachings of Buddhism.

Many of FEBC's Chinese programs are targeted at intellectuals. One of the early trials was *The Pursuit of Truth* which emphasized that we search for the truth together with the audience. After the Tien An Men Square incident in 1989, intellectuals caved in to a mood of desperate disappointment. At that time *The Pursuit of Truth* drew considerable mail response as it performed the apologetic role. Later *In Search of Life* in the New Life Series targeted intellectuals also. In recent years we have *The Vagabonds' Heart* with overseas Chinese scholars playing the main roles. They present the Gospel through sharing the feelings of a vagabond.

This type of intellectual-targeted program does not easily get written responses from the audience. One of the successful examples of apologetic programs was *In Search of Life*. It set up a reading club in the program and got many responses from the audience who love reading and thinking. Their responses helped audience relations staff do their work.

Discussion Questions

- Are there people in your community who like debating these kinds of questions? If so do you have a program for them?
- What do people you meet on the street really think about the purpose of life - and what they exist for? Can you engage their interest? If not, do you know of someone who can who could make a radio program with you?

Role 9 - PROCLAMATION

Declaring the Whole Gospel

Again, we must first explain our terms so as not to be misled by the English terminology. A ministry of proclamation in biblical terms is concerned with declaring truth without any shame, but also in a manner that listeners can understand.

We take our cue from the Old Testament prophets who spoke the words of God. Although we make the mistake of confusing the word *prophecy* with foretelling the future, proclamation is what the prophets did. They warned of coming judgment and the coming of Christ as well as clearly stating the truth about God and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

In our attempts to make programs attractive to our audience Christian broadcasters sometimes neglect to give a clear presentation of what the Bible teaches. Former FEBC Program Director, Carl Lawrence made this point well when he said: *We are in danger of saying nothing — beautifully.* We also stand in danger of going to the other extreme and include talk of sin, judgment, forgiveness and eternal life in every program! This is a recipe for quickly losing an audience. It suggests that the presenter's understanding of the Gospel, his knowledge of his audience and his role as a communicator are seriously inadequate.

We do need solid verse-by-verse teaching of the Word of God to accomplish the proclamation role. But we also need to say it plainly in simple language that people can understand and take interest in. Both content and format should be relevant to the listener, to the listening context and the radio medium. Radio audiences are not church congregations. Monologue may be the most practical and appropriate format in certain situations but not so desirable for an interesting radio program that people will want to listen to. We are likely to attract a much wider audience and get our message across with greater effectiveness if we creatively use other formats (or frames to frame the picture). For example, group discussion, dialogue or interviews will convey the message just as effectively if not more so.

We might ask “what is the whole Gospel?” Clearly it goes further than simply stating how we might enter, through faith in Jesus Christ, into God’s family. It extends beyond that.

Any proclamation of the Gospel needs to be supported by actions that are consistent with the Gospel. As Jesus pointed out we shall be judged by our actions. In a day where words and ideologies are cheap people are not easily swayed by persuasive arguments or presentations. They need to also feel and experience the love of Christ in action through his people. Words and action need to go hand-in hand and speak the same message.

Finally a brief word about preaching on the radio since proclamation and preaching are sometimes taken to mean the same thing. The best place for preaching is within the context of a church service. There may be good reason to broadcast church services – like for those who cannot get to a church on Sundays. But, apart from that, a preaching style of delivery does not normally belong to radio. After all, we would not normally sit down to talk with a friend – and then preach at him!

For radio we need to get away from a traditional church-based understanding of proclamation as preaching and find ways of making clear presentations of the truth in a contemporary way. It may have to be through indirect means that we gain his understanding.

Chapter 3 – *Dimensions of the Message* - expands on our understanding of the Message we need to deliver — and how it relates to the mass media. Chapter 4 – *Incarnational Radio* explores more deeply how we incarnate that living word of God in the context of radio.

Illustrations

Who Is Jesus? was the name of a very effective group discussion program that was aired in Manila's Overseas English service. Each week the discussion revolved around statements that Jesus made about himself - like "I am the Bread of Life". What did he mean by that? The presenter led the discussion and was able to bring out the truth that Jesus was communicating. Although not preaching, it was making some very clear statements about who Jesus is, and in an interesting and spontaneous (= unscripted) manner.

Discussion Questions

- What proportion of your programs are in this category (of Proclamation)?
- How effectively do you think they perform this role?
- Are your proclamation programs the kind that the person-in-the-street would want to listen to? - Why? (or Why not?)
- What ideas do you have for fresh and exciting programs of Proclamation?

Role 10 – COUNSELLING

Being Closest to Our Listener

Radio presenters become trusted friends in the lives of their listeners. Their programs provide the opportunity to meet many of their listeners' needs in personal ways. Media today have become more interactive and listeners (and viewers too) are often invited to interact with the station to say how they have been affected by the program they have just seen or heard.

A counselling role can take various forms. There is off-line (mail and e-mail correspondence) counselling or on-line (through phone-in programs), or counselling in which the presenter answers listeners' letters directly on-air. The Internet also allows for rapid interaction between listener and station personnel and tends to be more informal. Local circumstances will dictate what can be done practically and radio stations and their producers are encouraged to experiment to find out what works best for them.

Experience from around the world shows that such programs are relevant and have great impact. This is especially true of late-night programs. The busy-ness of the day no longer crowds out underlying fears and problems and with the closing in of the night comes the darkness of their problems and feelings, loneliness and despair.

Talkback radio has become increasingly popular. Programs often focus on a particular theme and listeners are invited to share their opinions and ideas, as well as asking questions. In some countries it may not be something that listeners are very comfortable with at first. Authoritarian governments have left a legacy of fear in which people are afraid to speak up and share their opinions. In some cultures impacted by other religious systems it may be inappropriate for women, for example, to express their views, or only in the presence of other women. More discreet methods such as text messaging may be preferred.

Letter and e-mail counselling is also effective. For international broadcasts these may be the only options at present, but this could change with on-air studios in target areas being linked to international stations via satellite. Letter counselling is not so program-intensive but, in order to be of maximum effect, follow-up staff need to work closely with program producers and presenters to ensure that programming relates closely to the people who write and what they write about.

A golden rule of effective letter counselling is that the primary questions of the letter-writer be responded to — whatever they are. Some questions may seem totally irrelevant to the ministry of the Gospel, but many first-time writers are often checking out the Christian station. If they receive a sympathetic and friendly response it will probably open the way for further contact.

Letter counsellors are sometimes divided into three categories. The first is the befriender whose objective is straightforward: befriend the writer and win his confidence. After several exchanges of correspondence a tract may be inserted in the letter — but without comment. If this generates some kind of response then the writer will subsequently be referred to the second level of counsellor. Deeper spiritual questions are turned over to the third counsellor. These letters require a much deeper level of understanding, experience, and spiritual insight. Listeners are also encouraged to personally visit the offices for face-to-face encounter — a regular occurrence.

One great attraction of radio stations is the anonymity they provide for listeners who have problems that are taboo in their own culture. Many writers from India seek advice for sexual problems and difficult relational problems. Where else could they get it? The station must honour this level of privacy. That is why localised follow-up of listeners may not always be wise.

Letters can be answered on-air for different reasons. The listener's question could be representative of many others who would also like to ask the same question. Another reason is that sending a reply by letter may endanger the listener (for contact with a Christian station) or it may have little chance of arriving. There is also an *eavesdropping* effect. Listeners like to hear about other peoples' real life problems — and the advice being given. In many instances, presenters can ask other listeners to send in their advice or experience. Research has shown that this participatory effect of listener-involved programming is very effective.

Illustrations

FEBC's Manila station, DZAS, provides counselling through its *Heartline* program which comes on air at 10:00pm each night. Each night the scene is set for a specific theme and listeners are invited to respond. A trained counsellor takes the phone calls in the studio after the callers have been previously screened off-air. Some callers are diverted to off-air counsellors while selected ones are put through to the on-air counsellor.

Talk Radio is a major component of Radio Teos' schedule in Russia. Six hours a day are allocated to phone-in programming, much of it dedicated to family issues. Presenter Kozlov in St Petersburg describes how he talks the language of the street in order to engage common people in discussion. He has also learned to make himself vulnerable by openly sharing his concerns, fears, anxieties and heartaches — and if he is having a bad day. In a country that under communism discouraged people from expressing themselves publicly - or even sharing their concerns - the Teos network has done much to get the Russian people talking openly

Discussion Questions

- In what ways do you encourage your listeners to interact with you and receive further counselling and help?
- Do you see your off-air ministry as an important part of your total ministry?
- How closely do your off-air and on-air ministries relate to each other?
- In what ways might you maximise feedback from your listeners?
- Are you partnering with other Christian groups to provide a robust counselling service?

Role 11 - SUPPLEMENTARY

Providing Helpful Resources

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *supplement* as ‘a thing or part added to remedy deficiencies or amplify information.’ Supplementary programming has the role of filling in the gaps or meeting observed needs — as best we can — through the responsive use of radio.

FEBC's experience has been to exercise this role especially by providing radio programs that help, teach and encourage believers in situations where the local church cannot meet their needs.

This role is an ultimate test of radio's flexibility. It calls for us to set aside preconceived notions about what radio is good for and allows us to experiment with less-conventional uses of radio in response to specific needs

A clear illustration of this principle was the use of Bible dictation programs for China. In China's case it was driven by a specific need. Under communism Bibles were destroyed, imports were banned, and printing was prohibited. For a long time, the only viable means of getting scriptures to the mainland Chinese, apart from smuggling, was via dictation by radio.

For 17 years Bible dictation was a regular feature of FEBC's broadcasts to China. In the studio one person dictated from one side of the table while a second person across the table wrote down what he said to make sure the reader kept to the right pace. At one point a well-known China researcher estimated that more than half the Bibles in China at that time were hand-written. It is a testimony to the effectiveness of a format (dictation) that we don't usually associate with radio programs.

Another aspect of this role came to light when we discovered that, for many listeners, Christian broadcasts served as their church. Listeners in Japan would tell us so. Chinese house-church leaders declared it was so. Listeners in Russia for many years met in small groups around their radios, eliminating the need to register with the government (because they were not large enough).

Developing radio churches is not something FEBC has encouraged. They did not want to establish their own electronic church denomination. Instead they prefer to steer people toward their own local fellowship of believers. The underlying philosophy of Christian broadcasting stresses the need for seeing listeners brought to faith in Christ and incorporated into a local fellowship of believers. But this also needed to be balanced with the reality. For various reasons, the reality is that many listeners have no local church fellowship, or don't have access to teaching or worship opportunities. FEBC is their church.

Responding to such needs in a responsible way extends beyond Bible teaching. It needs to include instruction on such things as how to organise a Christian fellowship group, teaching hymns or songs of worship. At the same time it encourages new believers to reach out to other believers or pray that God would put them in touch with others who are listening.

A few years ago cultic elements in S.E. Asia were infiltrating Christian groups and introducing a lot of false teaching. Radio programming staff were able to respond quickly by preparing and airing shortwave programs that spoke directly to the confusion being caused by the erroneous teaching.

Such supplementary programming means that the broadcaster stays in touch with the listeners' needs – whatever they may be. In many instances radio may be the only way to help.

Disaster relief efforts have also demonstrated the effectiveness of radio in providing information in the aftermath of natural disaster. Such was the case with the 2008 flooding in Indian state of Bihar. Even via shortwave special radio programs came to the help of many people stranded by flood waters for many days by bringing them news and up-to-date information. It also provided them with a point of contact via mobile phone.

Illustrations

IBRA Radio, another Christian broadcasting organisation, has developed a radio series to meet a similar need. "The Church in My Home" program series was developed in the context of North Africa originally but has more recently been adapted for use elsewhere. It is prepared especially for isolated believers in remote villages in N. Africa and the Middle East. These are places where no visible church is allowed by law. So individuals are encouraged to listen regularly to CIMH broadcasts and have "fellowship" with other believers meeting in similar circumstances either in the same countries or in other Arab countries

The *Dawn China* project uses Chinese radio programming to promote the planting of churches throughout China. The program series presents the biblical basis for reaching out and provides practical know-how and encouragement. In this example we see radio as part of a two-step strategy for evangelism and church-planting.

Discussion Questions

- What practical needs might you be able to meet through an innovative radio program?
- Are there niche markets that you may be able to explore?
- Are you prepared to conduct some experimental broadcasts that you might be able to develop in partnership with other agencies?

Role 12 - CELEBRATION

Openly Celebrating God's Good News

Christian people have much to celebrate and should be among the happiest people on earth. Radio programs can be used to express that joy through celebration, fun and laughter - and by being of a generous spirit. What will our listeners think if, while looking to their radios for entertainment and relaxation, they find only a heavy mix of serious, issue-oriented topics and presentations? Isn't today's news bad enough already...? Sadly we often talk about being joyful but we struggle to express it.

One role of Christian programming is to demonstrate what we have to celebrate and how we celebrate it. Music, poetry and other art forms are ideal ways of expressing this. But do we do enough of it? Singing has always been one of the characteristics of the Christian community. Although often it is used to express sadness and other moods singing is also a sign of joy and happiness — attributes that communicate powerfully with the human spirit.

Of course, we need to consider what is appropriate in different programming contexts, so that we don't give the wrong impression to our audience and create misunderstanding. True expressions of happiness and joy, praise and worship must be found for each culture so that they will be recognised, have meaning and be understood. Radio can do much to propagate and popularise these expressions of praise and worship.

How can this be done in practice? Interviews may be a good way of bringing this out. The show host could interview Christians about their life experiences and invite them to choose their favourite music. Choir festivals may work well in some cultures - or congregational singing for the radio, with good accompaniment. Or it could be a program that features Christian music artists who can talk about their faith, and the music and songs it has prompted or enjoy singing? Any of these could provide platforms for expressing meaningful joy to those who listen.

Of course, it need not involve music, but could feature poetry. A popular radio program could be a way of stimulating listeners to write their own poems for different moods and occasions. But this is a very cultural thing, and while it may work in some cultures it won't work in others.

The biggest challenge will be to maintain genuine and spontaneous expressions of joy. We are in danger of appearing trite or shallow, and out of touch with reality. Joy in the midst of difficulty, pain and hardship is much more meaningful and closer to the realities of life and the experiences of most. And that is often where the deepest joy is found.

Illustrations

In 1998 FEBC's Chinese broadcasters organized two Praise and Thanksgiving festivals (special programs) in the Radio Church series. It lasted for a whole week. Every day they had one hour to express praise and thanks to their Heavenly Father together with their audience by using hymns and short messages. This was a kind of celebration and the response was good. They are considering adding similar programs to encourage listeners to worship and pass on the Good News.

In the Philippines we find one of the best models of what can be done through praise music.

The *Papuri!* (Praise!) project was set up in 1979 to encourage the development of authentic musical expressions of Christian faith within the Filipino culture. For too long the Filipino church had depended on western music.

FEBC-Philippines staff felt the time had come for change. Project organisers encouraged Filipino Christians to write their own songs in a national competition. A panel selected the best fourteen entries from around 300 submitted. Accomplished musicians arranged the music and the resulting songs were recorded in the FEBC music studio.

A cassette album, launched at a series of concerts, was compiled from the winning entries and was accompanied by a songbook with complete music and lyrics. This became an annual event. The cassette albums are sold in department store chains and other outlets throughout the Philippines, and among Filipino migrant workers in the Middle East.

Discussion Questions

- What joyful celebrations might you be able to provide for your listeners?
- How might you seek to involve them in a celebration event so that they can also participate?
- How can you stage a celebration with just a few people?
- What alternatives are there to using music?

Role 13 - MODELLING

Demonstrating Christian Community

We cannot separate radio from community. Radio, used in the right way, fosters a strong sense of community and models Christian community to our listeners.

Most Christian radio stations are established on an interdenominational basis and so are already in the process of working across the denominational spectrum. A direct result of this is that Christians from a wide variety of denominations can all point to the station and say "this is our station".

Radio has a unifying effect among believers. But how do we cope with shades in theological persuasion or denominational distinctives? When it comes to specific programs in which contradictory views might be expressed it is clear that there needs to be some good policies and procedures in place. These should seek to turn the disagreements into a positive exploration of the differences rather than being confrontational. FEBC's Program Policy has some clear directives.

But we can do more. By demonstrating our ability to function together *in community* we validate our message to the wider world. We can broadcast programs that provide news and information about other Christian groups. We can enter into partnership with organisations to help them extend their ministry or achieve their goals. For example, we may broadcast programs that support the field-work of a Christian community development agency. We might also air distance-education programs that help a Bible seminary be more effective by using radio to reach students spread far and wide.

To demonstrate unity on air we could get people together in the studio and model for our listener how, as fellow believers, we can work together in spite of international and interdenominational differences. Another outcome of this is to reduce misunderstanding about the relationship between radio and the Church and disarm accusations of radio being isolated from the Church.

Interdev Partnership Associates (formerly known as Interdev)⁸ is one Christian organisation that took upon itself the responsibility of helping to forge partnerships among various Christian agencies with a shared interest. Now its founder, Phill Butler, has written a classic book on the subject - *Well Connected*⁹. FEBC and Feba have been involved in several such partnerships, collaborating with non-radio agencies in co-ordinated strategies. The process has often been lengthy because a lot of *history* that has to be worked through. The various agencies involved need to share a common vision and to feel their need for each other as they work toward a common purpose. It has not been without pain, but where they have succeeded, these partnerships have been driven by the reality that they can be both more effective in ministry and better stewards of resources.

Besides the scope mentioned in the above paragraphs, modelling may include role modelling in the programs for the audience. Studies have suggested using this method to accelerate changes in society and to contain education in entertainment. That means to design some role models in radio drama to promote Christian ethics through their choices.

⁸ <http://interdev.org>

⁹ *Well Connected*, Phill Butler, 2006, Authentic Publishing, Colorado Springs

Illustrations

FEBC's broadcasts to China made efforts to play out roles in a Christian family. Their Chinese department had two of their broadcasters and their two sons appear in a program to demonstrate to the audience the model of a Christian family. They expressed biblical viewpoints and testimony on topics like their relationship as a couple and their discipline of their children. Many family problems exist in mainland China, and role-modelling is a practical way to help address these by example.

In the Philippines during marathon broadcasts on specific themes it was common to invite pastors from a range of denominations to participate. Even when controversial themes were discussed the pastors did not always agree but they could be heard to be accepting of one another's views. It resulted in Christians from a wide spectrum of churches being able to all refer to "their station". As one church statesman observed "FEBC has a unifying effect on the Christian community."

Discussion Questions

- How well do you work with other churches and Christian denominations?
- What practical steps can you take in your radio program production to include other Christian agencies?
- How might you use radio programs to promote better understanding and fellowship within the Body of Christ (= the Church) among your audiences?
- How is your program or station perceived - as strictly denominational or as accepting of others and open to partnership?
- What are you modelling to your listeners?

Role 14 - INTERACTIVE

Encouraging Listener Participation

The traditional understanding of radio has been that it is a one-way channel of communication. But radio has been increasingly effective where the community it serves is involved or participates. This participatory role has evolved as the dynamics of communication have become better understood and communications technology has developed.

The world is becoming increasingly interactive. Radio and TV stations are no longer those remote places of power and influence but are now more easily accessible and welcoming. Trends are leading us to a more participatory world which demands that we become much more relational and organic in our programming strategy.

The section on counselling focused on one specific aspect of interaction. But it has wider application. Not least of these is by encouraging the listener to participate in our programs.

Participatory program techniques say to the listener that he is important and that his opinions are both valued and heard. Experience in successful health promotion communication projects has shown that communities respond well to being able to participate in the planning, preparation and production of programs.

Often, this is done by inviting listeners to talk directly about their needs and circumstances. In some instances this has meant taking production equipment into the field and producing programs there with listeners contributing. Listeners can be encouraged to send in their stories, poems or other items as digital files, on cassette — or by letter or e-mail. We have learnt something quite profound when we have learnt to maximise the use of radio to meet listeners' needs in relevant ways, even at the expense of reduction in technical quality. We give listeners a voice by providing feedback to enhance dialogue and understanding.

Phone-in programs (talk-back) are very popular, and can also provide this dynamic in very significant ways. Phone-in presenters need unique skills and special training. In some countries where anonymity is preferred listeners choose to send text messages.

New technologies are also making it easier. A number of radio and TV stations are now using Twitter¹⁰ to provide rapid short bursts of feedback from listeners using a web-based interface. The station can also use it as a means of keeping contact with listeners off-air.

It is all part of the process of making ourselves as presenters vulnerable — and accountable — for what we say and do. We are an alternative for our listeners and our concern is for the whole person. The process of interaction with our listeners demands our constant attention. Electronic communication inter-activity has become a way of life for many thanks to the rapid development and influence of the Internet. Broadcasters are similarly expected to provide it. But the way we do our programming needs to change too as presenters become much more vulnerable and "real" to their listeners. Revealing their daily personal struggles tends to endear them to their listeners when they see they are "ordinary" people too.

¹⁰ Visit <http://twitter.com/radioroles> to sign up for regular updates on the Radio Roles web-site.

Illustrations

"Talk radio" provides some of the best examples of this and is becoming increasingly common today. The *Heartline* program in Manila was one of FEBC's first as they worked through a variety of family and relational issues each night. The program was duly copied in Indonesia where it later became an FEBC brand of stations. When it first went to air in Jakarta for a one-hour broadcast on Sunday nights listeners continued to respond for the next few days. Extra staff had to be hired to cope with this response.

The FEBC network of stations in Russia also provide several hours daily as they encourage listeners to speak up and share their opinions openly. Stations working in community development encourage listeners to phone in to the station or send SMS (text) messages if preferred.

Discussion Questions

- How well are you using new technologies to provide feedback from your listeners?
- Do you make it easy for your listeners to interact with you?
- Are you a 9-to-5 broadcaster or are you available for interacting with listeners outside of regular office hours

Postscript

If you want to engage in further discussion on this topic kindly visit the Radio Roles web-site using either the Contact Us tab or the blog.

You can also read up more about The Gray Matrix at the dedicated web-site:

<http://thegraymatrix.info>

Further Information

You can download further copies of this document by visiting the Radio Roles web-site at

http://radiatoroles.com/downloads/rpr_ch1.pdf