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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR USE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA ON TRADITIONAL CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The rate at which electronic media was growing in scope and purposes of its use, its levels, communication genres, types of spaces and impact on human relations was an area of interest to postmodern researchers in various disciplines. The study sought to investigate how various aspects of church life, identity and mission are being influenced by use of electronic media. Since it is a global shift in means, scope and control of content in communication, the church cannot ignore it. The selected churches in Kiambu County emerged out of need to investigate the church leaders' opinions on the impact the use of electronic media had upon their churches. A total population of sixty eight (68) church leaders in an International leadership summit participated in the study. Regarding the use and misuse of electronic media on selected ministries and influence on traditional relationships, the participants scored 63% on negative use and 37% on positive use. The main recommendation was that the church leaders engage in lifelong scholarship on emerging media technologies regarding their use and misuse in order to guide their members on how to live godly in the emerging digital continent.

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

According to online Business Dictionary, electronic media is broadcast or stored by use of digital technology in form of television, radio, internet, fax, CD-ROMs, and any other medium that requires electrical or digital means to encode information. The term 'electronic media' is often used in contrast with printed media. Does use of electronic media challenge different institutions of postmodern societies?

The message and implications from the selected studies done around the world on use of electronic media

Study by Butler (2014) made an observation in Pennsylvania, USA, on how uncontrolled children's use of media in the family undermined parental authority and character of the children. Electronic tablets were bought for right educational uses by children but no rules were given regarding boundaries in the Christian family. No monitoring was done for some time. It did not take long before the mother realized that their eight year old child used it for constructive learning and dangerous games. The challenge was that the child needed biblically-guided rules on what to access, when and why, before being given the tablet to use. The family set limits for use of electronic media and technology based on their families'

spiritual, social, and economic and health standards and aspirations. Considering the fact that churches are made of families, are there concerns in the Church that use of electronic media may create unhealthy tensions between members and leaders? The Catholic arch diocese of Seattle Washington (USA) developed principles, policies and guidelines for parishes, schools and programmes regarding the use of electronic media, specifically social media for their church members and schools in 2013. The guidelines were drawn from United States Catholic Conference guidelines.

Three principles were formulated to regulate church leaders on the use of social media. *Boundary principle*. The Pope led the conference participants to apply godly convictions as the underlying power that enables each church leader to create boundaries on use of social media so that private and professional ethics do not run into conflict. *Information dissemination principle*. The Christian doctrines, beliefs and practices are to guide church leaders on what to share or participate in through the forum of social media just as they would share in the face to face settings. *Principle of responsibility*. The church personnel are responsible and accountable to God and other people for activities online as in other aspects of communication. Do these principles have a contemporary significance in the cultural context in which the church in Kenya lives and serves? Horse field, Hess & Medrano (2004) edited Brief in Media: cultural perspectives on media and Christianity, in Australia, and published the findings. Horse field later expanded this study in his discussion of shifts in custodians of religious truth from traditional

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religious institutions and face to face communication of the truth along with print media have occurred worldwide in all contexts where cultural, intellectual, religious and technological interactions are taking place since the turn of twentieth century and increasingly in twenty first century. His main interest was to study how media worked in order to use it as a tool for religious communication. The gap between his study and that on church leaders of Kiambu County, Kenya was that Horse field focused on instrumentalist perspective whereas the latter focused on impact of use of media on various aspects of church life, identity and mission. Horse field found that churches have cultures and special needs which motivated their use or misuse of electronic media. In his latter studies, he researched media and Christianity from a cultural approach which focused on power dimensions in theology. This was a positive contribution to the study on church leaders of Kiambu County in that the study sought to establish whether use of electronic media affected authority relationships within the local churches. He identified five major eras in cultural communication as primary oral culture, manuscript culture, emerging during the early Hellenistic period, print culture, emerging in the West at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, silent print culture, emerging around the time of the Enlightenment and postmodern secondary oral or electronic culture.

Findings from study done with participants who were church leader trainees in USA

In their book, Youth, identity and digital media, John & Catherine (2008, eds.) have pointed out the crises the American youth are in ranging from religious identity to all other aspects of their identity. The book explains that use of electronic media has broken all kinds of boundaries and at different levels to different groups of people in their communities. Who an individual consumer of electronic media interacts with is not easy to tell. He surprising truth is that electronic consumers have no personal boundaries themselves regarding what to consume and what not to consume. This should be the starting point of control strategies each church leadership in Kiambu County needed to put in place in innovative ways according to the culture of the local church, surrounding community and global community.

Innovative strategy for godly use of electronic media in the church: Africa friendly

Wayne, (2009) conducted a study on the importance of translating the Christian message into vernacular of the people. He used eight items in his questionnaire. His title was *The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement Questionnaire: A Tool for Investigating Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for the Acceptance of Vernacular Scripture Translations*.

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Condition 1: Appropriate language. The maintenance factors are that the community is not switching rapidly to another language, potential leaders use the mother tongue in adequate domains and middle and leaders live in the area in order to provide godly leadership to younger generations. *Attitudinal*

factors are that local language is considered high enough for the scriptures to be read and applied in that language and the dialect used is acceptable across social strata, among other factors.

Condition 2: Acceptable translation. National translators are credible so that the cultural group can consider the scriptures to be God's word to them. The local community leaders participate in the translation process so that they can own the scriptures translated and recommend them the people.

Condition 3: Acceptable format is used so that originality, media, ethnic arts, electronic media format of communication and literacy levels is considered.

Condition 4: Background knowledge. People can make sense out of scriptures because they are given background knowledge as introduction to original cultures which heard God's message first time. This enables the Christians to get original meanings of the scriptures to them to apply.

Condition 5: Availability. Anyone who wants to obtain a copy of the scriptures can do so without much struggle or cost. It may mean that there is a trained person to distribute the scriptures to the people where they live or meet for religious meetings.

Condition 6: Spiritual hunger. Evaluation be done to ascertain that people in the ethnic group have a hunger and it is satisfied when they turn to God through the reading of the scriptures to find solutions to their felt or real needs and challenges. Finding out these needs is essential part of evaluative prior study, needs assessment. Discovering Holy spirit's work in the community, the life cycles that involve religious rituals and local cosmology are important.

Condition 7: Freedom to commit. People freely commit their lives to Christ when allowed to do so at different rates and spiritual levels, including syncretism for a start. Traditional religions function at different depths for different people in the community being transformed using electronic media to do missionary work of Matthew 28:18-20.

Condition 8: Partnering with local churches and other Christian missions. Working together with other like-minded servants in the community enhances ownership of the missionary work, increases understanding and mutual support needed, and ensures continuity of Christian community created.

Purpose of the study

The study on Church leaders of Kiambu County sought to establish the extent to which they were able to work innovatively with electronic media using television, internet and other digital instruments in order to innovatively join the global flow in the emerging digital continent.

Theses which guided the study

- Use of electronic media by church members was

undermining the benefits of being under visible church authority in that openness to multimedia sources of religious services had exposed the church members to variety of spiritual and religious authorities which created accountability crisis.

- Use of electronic media was contributing to a decline in enrollment in theological training for face to face modes of learning in favor of virtual learning which created led to loss of doctrinal control in leadership training.
- Use of electronic media was negatively influencing commitment members to their local churches.
- Use of electronic media was providing theologically useful content to members and leaders who were gradually becoming members of global virtual church.
- Use of electronic media by members was spiritually helpful like a storehouse of Malachi 3:8 and there deserving of their tithes.
- Use of television (TV) to evangelize was replacing the need to for face to face outdoor mass evangelism.
- Christian TV programmes were increasing members in the local churches through conversion.
- Conservative Christians who were marginalized in their local churches stayed home to watch Christian TV on Sunday morning instead of attending local church services because they sought for love and acceptance from godly Christian programmes.

Statement of the problem

Research concerns on the church in Kenya have concentrated on prosperity Gospel as a malpractice in Christian ministry, mostly in Pentecostal churches. The challenge of money and wealth in some East African Pentecostal Churches. Julius Gathogo (2011) Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Kenyatta University, Mombasa, Kenya. The study by Gathogo (2011) has focused on the economic problems associated with prosperity Gospel in church in Nairobi. The influence of prosperity gospel was a challenge to the church ministries, credibility of church leaders and name of God in Kenya because of negative publicity through media. It did not do anything about causes of the phenomenon and practice. Behind such practices lies sinful nature, such as greed leading to misuse of church authority. Most likely the malpractice has spread through the use of electronic media in Christian programmes. Professor Lucy Maina of Kenyatta University worked with Africa Media development Initiative but not on this aspect of how use of electronic media by the African church was being negotiated. These omissions and other potential challenges reviewed on use of electronic media in the Western church were the gaps the study sought to fill by conducting research with church leaders, recommending and disseminating the findings.

Literature review and innovative strategies tried elsewhere

Auday (2009) conducted a study with 1342 college students in four Christian colleges in the US to establish effects of use of electronic media by college students. The findings indicated that use of electronic media had negative effects on Christian students preparing to lead churches in various capacities. These effects included but were not limited to poor time management, loss of face to face interaction skills, and neglect of important

areas of life, acquisition of mixed values, declining psychological and spiritual health. The findings further revealed that 55% of students who participated in the study spent 1-4 hours a day on face book, my space, twitter and blogs. When asked the reason why they spent so much time on this kind of media, 70% said 'socializing'. According to another study done by CampBell and Teusner (2011) titled 'Religious Authority in the Age of the Internet', the use of electronic media by church members undermined royalty to denominational leaders in local churches by raising a new group of virtual leaders who have diverse interpretations of the Bible for media users and loss of control over religious materials being used by users of digital media. The media was flattening the traditional church hierarchies and created shifts in accountability through provision of answers by media preachers and preachers which traditional leaders used to provide. It was further revealed that moral structures are being reformed toward becoming relativistic due to inability of the users to differentiate values in different types of information, using electronic media for its own sake and lack of skill in meditating on godliness.

Dialogue within the church on the use of electronic media and way forward

Is there a need for postmodern church to be driven by Conviction that contexts, cultures and times change but God and His work through the church remain? In his book, Christian ethics: An introductory reader, Wells (2010) has expressed that the church can evangelize far and wide through electronic media as long as the message is proclaimed by prayerful people, is authentic and holy Spirit is at work. However, he has observed that use of electronic media has "exacerbated individual and social problems which stand" in the way of the Gospel. Vogt (2011) has compared and contrasted the modern age of print media with postmodern ways of electronic media to pass the Christian to the next generation. On a positive note, Ordonez (2000) sees challenge positively as an issue of contextualization of use of electronic media by the church in order to reach others for Christ. Foster (2009) sees use of electronic media as marketing tool for churches. He does not address the content being marketed. In response to the fact that use of electronic media is a constantly growing and globally accepted means of communication, Rolfes and Zukowski (2007) have recommended a constant contextualization of theology to work with electronic media rather than to fight it. Badaracco (2005), recommends that the church runs ongoing pastoral care programmes that train them to be specifically responsive to positive use of electronic media and constructively reactive to its challenges, especially to moral life of the church. Morgan (2008) has supported the use of vernacular as an innovative strategy to create sustains affinity and ownership between electronic media and specific Christian communities. He has cited this strategy as one of the reasons why the church continues to have experience of God's presence in Africa.

Biblical and theological foundations on godly use media in the church

Looking at church authority from church members' perspective, the church has divergent views on whether

electronic media promotes evangelistic mission. Schweer (2014) has provided brief Biblical and theological foundations for evangelism being an integral part of church mission in the Old Testament and New Testament. God is an effective and purposeful communicator. He created the universe by speaking (see Genesis 1-2). Throughout the Bible, God worked in and through people mostly by speaking. The means of communication varied from time to time and place to place. He spoke to Moses in Numbers 10 to instruct the priests to communicate the right content using the right trumpet sound. Applying this truth to use of electronic media by Christians, there is a biblical justification for it.

However, the communication needs to conform to the biblical standards and guidelines in terms of goals, content and methodology. Awolowo (2007) conducted a study in Nigeria on the role of use of effective electronic media language in evangelism by Pentecostal churches using radio broadcasting. He found out that the awareness of the context, use of persuasive power, where target populations were, utterance, imperatives and tenor contributed positively to leading hearers of the Gospel to Jesus Christ. Foulger (2004) gave suggestions for effective use of electronic media to exercise God-given authority in evangelistic mission include; Identification of clear and precise goal you wish to accomplish by your mass media work, investment of enough time, money, and effort into your mass media program to permit success, not placing all your trust and energy into mass media alone (or any other medium of communication alone," for that matter. Use a broad scope, multi-media approach. Promote group study, group commitment, and group conversions, through your mass media and personal contact combination. Use the mass media to strengthen, inform, legitimize, and publicize your ministry.

Use a localized focus by including local references as much as possible. Conduct research both qualitative and quantitative) into the characteristics of your audience. No mass media communicator can reach his readers or listeners effectively unless he knows what kind of people he is attempting to reach Study your audience. Know their special needs. And then, show how the Word of Life can help solve their problems. Be as warm, friendly and personable as you can be. Use repetition. Remember that not every person is going to hear or read every word you say. Not demanding that God give you instant success, and don't usurp credit from the Lord for the success you do achieve. Then, trust the Lord to give the increase.

Writing skills for electronic media message as remedy to misuse of media in the church

Arendt (2014), in her review article '*Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defingit*' has provided some guidelines of writing quality electronic media message as one of the factors that influence its effectiveness on the target audience. Her review summarizes works of Basso, Hines and FitzGerald (1978). First, attribution is important. The communicator points out the need to be listened by pointing out the reason why the listener needs the content being delivered. Second, time element is important in that majority digital media users do not have a lot of time to follow lengthy discourse to get the point. Electronic media users need brief

and clear message. Third, being conversational tends to provide a sense of physical presence of the communicator for any kind of electronic media. Fourth, objectivity is necessary. What applies to every listener can be received by different listeners, personalized and considered for application. Fifth, research-based information regarding the target users is an added advantage.

Understanding of changing conceptualization of time, space and place among electronic technology users and implications on church authority

Tsatsou (2009) has discussed the complexities between users of emerging electronic media technologies and associated shifts in their conceptualization of time, space and place in the era of electronic media and communications. Time has been redefined as natural time and abstract time. Natural time is understood as clock time devoted to the specific electronic media programme. Abstract time is understood to refer to how the user of the media experiences time available for the use of the programme. A Christian interested in using a television programme by a certain preacher at a specifically slated air time may not be available that time due to work-related or family-related competitor of time. Tsatsou has also called this abstract time phenomenological time, experiential time or personal time. Electronic media calls for actions in various global spaces by merging actual space of the communicator with other actual spaces of consumers of information within virtual community, (Robertson, 1992, Giddens, 1994). Castells (2000) calls this total space the space of flows and society formed in this process a network society. This society is characterized by virtually connected relationships (Licoppe, 2004). According to Lee and Liebenan (2000, p.44), electronic media technologies have affected users' perceptions of time and how time is organized. Looking at the relevance of these insights on how electronic media affects authority relationships in selected churches in Kiambu County, gaps that existed when data was collected included lack of affordability, lack of skills, divergent cultural attitudes towards use of media as Christians and lack of what Klammer *et al.* (2000), calls disposable time.

Critical review of theories and gaps in theories

Time-related and space-related theories and relevance to church authority

Sang-Hee, Kyung-Ho and Do-Hyun (2011) in their study titled '*Time and Space Perception on Media Platforms*' have identified three main categories of electronic media as social media, mass media and digital media. Communication genres identified included but were not limited to, e-mail, blogs, mass media, e-commerce and social media. Theories used were two; time-related theory, called temporal distance theory and space-related theory, called media theory. Two variables in the conceptual framework were interactions (contents, users and media levels) as independent variables and cognition of spatial and temporal levels as dependent variables.

Authority conflict theories and gaps

Cole (1998) has defined authority as formal power conferred

to an individual to act so that he or she may fulfill the assigned responsibilities by the authorizing source. According to Enoch and Markwell (2010), types of power and relationships involved are summarized in Table 1 below.

Social theories of authority

According to Zambrano (2000), 'Authority, Social theories of', has defined authority as relation between individuals.

Table 1. Summary of time and space categories

Media levels/order	Use and user levels	Types of space	Space significance	Relevance to church authority
Second order space	Aesthetic space	Information or data space	Interactive or relational space	Emergence of godly or ungodly authority.
First order space	Physical space	Conceptual space	Perceptual space	Transactions, personal
Zero order space	Para-space or no space	Space –time relations	Space-time relations	Information seeking, learning doctrines online

Table 2. Review on types of power and relationships involved

Type of power	Exercise approaches	Conflict-cooperation continuum	Relevance to godly church authority
Coercive power	Threats & punishments used	Hidden to open agendas. Pessimism to optimism	Faith in God for godly results
Reward power	Rewards used to influence compliance	Dwelling on the past to focus on the future.	Forgiveness leading to newness of life
Legitimate power	Authority used to act & control resources	Information as power to information as needed	Godly information shared for mutual benefit
Expert power	Data, information or skill used to convince people	Bad news not ok to bad news being ok as human experience.	Bad news ok as warning or facts on the ground, with a view of godly response.
Referent power	Personal power (charisma, reputation etc used to bypass system)	Old hurts unresolved to old hurts resolved. People do not listen to people listening. Rigid behavior to flexibility. Blame culture to creative culture.	Forgiveness exercised and resulting in walking in the newness of life. Listening to each other and to God. Committed to change into more godliness. Focusing more on God-promised future than past failures.

Table 3. Distribution of participants and suggested innovations

Denomination & Nationality	Leadership position, duration & frequency	Number in each category	Type of top leadership categories	Suggested ways of minimizing ungodly use of electronic media
Pentecostal, Kenyan	Worship leaders, 3-12 yrs, Pastor, 3- 17yrs, Elder, 5	24 26	Pastor, Bishop (1) Pastor	Conduct events that enrich face to face fellowship Requesting the government to register church media censorship body.
Gulf Coast, USA, Mennonite, Tanzania	Rev. Dr Diocesan secretary, 7 yrs, one. Pastor, 5 yrs	1 1	Bishop	Use electronic media in the church and teach how to use it well. Warn on what is harmful.

Table 4. SPSS output regarding the responses on participants eight variables investigated and discussion of findings

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
vleantho	5	2.00	26.00	11.6000	9.76217
vtrain	5	3.00	22.00	11.6000	7.43640
comloch	5	2.00	25.00	11.8000	9.33809
virtchu	5	7.00	20.00	12.6000	6.10737
tihetv	5	1.00	31.00	10.0000	12.00000
tvevang	5	6.00	15.00	11.4000	3.36155
tvsserv	5	3.00	16.00	10.8000	5.97495
Valid N (listwise)	5		16.00	11.4000	6.30872

Table 5. Ranked order of participants' opinion on impact of use of electronic media and participants' recommendations in selected churches of Kianbu County, Kenya

Rank	Variable investigated & rank	Observations and recommendations
2	Harm of electronic media on authority relationship between members and visible leaders. SD=9.76217	Teach on the multidimensional mutual benefits of godly relationship with authority of the visible church
4	Harm of electronic media on enrollment into theological institutions. SD=7.43640	Train members on how to use media selectively based on biblical teachings.
3	Harm of electronic media on commitment to the local church. SD=9.33809	Teach the church benefits of meetings of the early Church, see Acts 2:41-47.
6	Help by electronic media to virtual church users. SD= 6.10737	Prayerfully and lovingly identify ways in which electronic media is beneficial.
1	Shift of tithe to electronic media preachers. SD= 12.00000	Teach Malachi 3:8 and meaning of spiritual storehouse to members. Local church is the storehouse where tithe goes.
7	Replacement of face to face evangelism by use of electronic media. SD=5.97495	Communication experts say non-verbal face to face is 65% and above. It is needed
5	Effectiveness of electronic media in making Christian converts. SD=6.30872	Indicated very low and zero results. Needs to be strengthened through contextualization strategies like translation of the Bible to mother tongue.
8	Sunday morning users of electronic media instead of going to visible church. SD=3.36155	This was the variable with the best consensus among the participants in selected churches in Kiambu county.

To Zambrano, social authority originated with Plato and legitimacy of its exercise depended on legitimacy of the source, relationship between individuals and desired outcomes. The gap between this social theory and church authority is in differences of nature, source, mode and purpose of exercise and desired outcomes. Seidman (1983) has cited Weber, (1978, pp. 213- 214) on distinctions of authority relations based on legitimacy, rather than forms. Referring to legitimacy as grounds, he identified three grounds as; rational grounds which depended on legality of rules to be followed and the right of those elevated to use the rules in their exercise of authority, traditional grounds which rested on historical sanctity of those who used the authority and charismatic grounds which depended on devotion to extraordinary heroism, character or sanctity of the human source of authority. This theory was adopted for the study of church authority among church leaders in Kiambu County with certain adjustments and application of underlying principles. For the church, legitimate source is God, mediated to mankind through Jesus Christ, (Matthew 28:18-20), exercised by Spirit-empowered Christians (Acts1:8) to promote purposes of God for holistic wellbeing of humanity (John 10:10). It is reasonable to consider God's authority over His creation to be legitimate by virtue of Him being the creator and owner of original creation (Psalm 24:1-2, Genesis 1:1). Those elevated by God to exercise His authority in the earth are born again Christians through their faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ may be likened to Weber's description in that Jesus is the divine hero, perfect in character with eternal sanctity as eternal.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data was analyzed using statistics package of social sciences (SPSS) and descriptive narratives. The sample was purposive in that church leaders were the best- placed for the kind of information needed by the researcher. The instrument used was a face to face supervised, self-reported questionnaire. It was structured on a five point likert scale, semi-structured and open-ended. The study observed the required ethical considerations. Sample size was sixty church leaders from a variety of local churches in Kiambu County. Other aspects such as ethical considerations were observed. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and descriptive statements.

Data analysis and discussion of findings

The findings of the study were considered timely and very useful for church in Kenya, specifically kiambu County. The church leaders did not appear to be highly literate in use of electronic media. Summary of demographic information of the sixty participants and suggested innovations on the godly use of media in the selected churches

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was observed that top leadership in the summit had a good leadership mix across leadership ranks and internationally. It was limited to three denominations and therefore it lacked views from other denominations. Other four different leaders interviewed gave similar findings. Standard deviations in Table

4 indicated that there were quite a variety of opinions on how use of electronic media by church members was affecting various relationships between church members and leaders, among church members and by extension, between church and God in the light of what the Bible teaches on expected upholding of Christian faith and practice. Looking at one variable at a time, a summary was presented as Table 5 below in a rank order of divergence of opinions. Based on the range of standard deviations, minimum of 3.36155, maximum of 12.00000 and range of 9, there were general uncertainties and challenges on how to assist the churches manage electronic media use in biblically-guided ways suggested by some participants in Table 3 above.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, on the use and misuse of electronic media on selected ministries and influence on traditional relationships, the participants scored 63% on negative use and 37% on positive use. Other detailed findings were summarized in tables. Recommendations made included but were not limited to the following:

1. That the church evangelize far and wide through electronic media as long as the message is proclaimed by prayerful people, was authentic and holy Spirit was at work.
2. That the church use of electronic media as marketing tool for churches in order to attract members and reduce negative publicity.
3. That church leaders engage the church in a constant contextualization of theology to work with electronic media rather than to fight it.
4. That the church needs ongoing pastoral care programmes that train leaders to be specifically responsive to positive use of electronic media and constructively reactive to its challenges, especially to moral life of the church.
5. That the church promotes and supports the use of vernacular as an innovative strategy to create and sustain affinity and ownership between electronic media and specific Christian communities, especially in Africa.
6. That the church uses language that was clear to specific audience.
7. Digital discourse was necessary as new apologetics.
8. That innovative shepherding is implemented by nurturing with redefined sense of local church.
9. That the church builds digital movements to minister life of God to people who could not be reached before.
10. That the church undertakes to creatively dialogue with government on legal aspects regarding the use and misuse of media, especially in negative publicity of the church.

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