

Media tools for communities hear us roar!

“Until the lions can tell their own story, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

African proverb

The mass media is an incredibly powerful tool. It provides the lens through which we see ourselves and the world around us. Like it or not, media shape culture, social policy and politics.

The airwaves over which media broadcast actually are owned by us, the public. Our needs, interests and cultures are supposed to be reflected in broadcast programming. Broadcast companies get free licenses to use our airwaves provided that they, in return, serve their communities.

Today, our communities are comprised of many voices. Whether we're parents who want more educational television programming, environmentalists concerned about conservation, independent artists without a mainstream audience — we need to reclaim our airwaves so that our authentic voices can be heard.

Around the country, communities are organizing to hold TV and radio stations accountable. Together, our voices are louder and stronger than our fragmented, individual voices. Join this growing movement to reclaim our right to speak and be heard on our airwaves!



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For faith groups

Why Media Matters



Are the views of your group and the issues concerning your organizing efforts covered fairly, if at all, in the media?

Are the needs, interests and viewpoints of all groups in your community given voice?

Are media accessible to you, and are media managers responsive to your suggestions?

Does mainstream media help or hinder positive change in your community?



imagine

Imagine how media could be used to bring us all together. **Imagine ...**

Media messages shaped by the ethical integrity of diverse people of faith

Programming that includes all religious perspectives, not just the strident voices of those who condemn and ostracize

Media and religious thought as partners for the benefit of all God's creation

Violence and hatred calmed thanks to accurate media coverage of persons of all faiths

Air time for those who work for reconciliation instead of for those who would divide and exclude



imagine

Imagine ... if we took back our airwaves.

Enough!

They had had enough. No longer would an ecumenical group of ministers from Arizona be lumped together with preachers spouting venom in the name of Christianity. No longer would they allow Christianity to be hijacked by hate mongers.

So the Arizona ministers formed "No Longer Silent," but found that their message of unconditional love was a harder sell than one of hate.

"We tried to buy a billboard in a prominent, well-traveled area of Phoenix," says the Rev. Eric Elnes, No Longer Silent member and pastor of Scottsdale (Ariz.) Congregational United Church of Christ.

Elnes says that more than 150 local pastors wanted to proclaim that God loves everyone, including gay and lesbian persons. But Clear Channel and Viacom, who owned the billboards, labeled the message "too controversial," effectively telling the pastors to shut up.

No Longer Silent couldn't overcome the censorship, but its energy was already created and, as the rules of science teach, energy can't be destroyed: it only can be transformed.

So Elnes rallied help and formed Cross Walk America, a 2,500-mile pilgrimage from Phoenix to Washington, D.C., between Easter Sunday and Labor Day weekend 2006. The pilgrimage would include speaking at local churches and interviewing with local media along the way, and would conclude with the posting of 12 affirmations on a Washington landmark — affirmations of unconditional divine love, justice and respect for all God's creation.

The grassroots effort is "a voice from the heartland that can't be ignored by the media," says Elnes, "a voice of hope for those who are spiritually homeless."

Elnes says he hopes Cross Walk America continues as a catalyst within the Christian mainstream.

"We need to make sure that the average person knows that there is more than one thought out there," he says, "that the public voice of Christianity isn't only fundamentalist."



Big names with deep pockets

Seven media giants control nearly everything you watch, hear or read: **News Corp.**, **General Electric**, **Viacom**, **TimeWarner**, **Walt Disney**, **Vivendi Universal**, and **Bertelsmann**. (For more information about these corporations, go to www.cjr.org/tools/owners.)

These companies pull the strings of the people who decide what news, movies, music and other programming reaches us. But the control doesn't stop there.

Other big players are those who make media policy: local government, the courts, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), lobbyists, the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States.

We are the most important players in this story. The airwaves belong to us — public interest groups, social justice organizers, families, neighbors, friends — and it is up to us to hold media accountable for meeting our needs and interests.

Information is power. Those who control our airwaves also control what we use to make decisions — whom to vote for, what products to buy, how we view others and how others view us.

Build bridges

Many local groups work for media justice, and plug into national organizations that cover a wide spectrum of media reform issues. Here are some resources for your group:

FaithfulAmerica.org

110 Maryland Ave NE #108, Washington, DC 20002
202.544.2350 / www.fithfulamerica.org

Interfaith website founded by the National Council of Churches; includes issues information and action opportunities.

People for the American Way

2000 M Street NW #400, Washington, DC 20035
202.467.4999 / www.pfaw.org

Advocates for values and institutions that sustain a diverse democratic society; includes information, resources and an action center.

UCC Justice and Peace Action Network

100 Maryland Ave. NE, Suite 330, Washington, DC 20002 / 202.543.1517 / www.ucctakeaction.org

Provides justice and peace action alerts, resource tools and information about issues.

No Longer Silent

nolongersilent.org / info@nolongersilent.org

Founded by Christian clergy against intolerance and discrimination, and for justice for all, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

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Media Empowerment Project

100 Maryland Ave. NE, Suite 300
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www.mediaempowerment.org

OC, Inc.'s Media Empowerment Project produces an excellent organizing resource, "The Media Empowerment Manual."

Getting our voices back

Join in, join up, speak up, speak out, pay attention, pay dues, call 'em up, call 'em out, go online, start a picket line, and reclaim our media!

Whatever your focus, your group needs to build alliances with others to effectively challenge media outlets. Those already organized, like churches and unions, will be good allies. Use these methods to call attention to community broadcasting practices:

Get your message out

A strong communication component is essential for your group.

Refine your message: What is your goal? What problems do you face? What are some of your success stories? What is the big story the media is missing?

Build relationships: Set up meetings with local media outlets to inform them of your work. Pitch compelling story ideas to them and regularly update them on your efforts.

Don't forget community media: Community newsletters, alternative newspapers in English or other languages, local radio programs and cable access television usually are more accessible to community groups.

Turn up the heat on local media

Pressure media to hold up their end of the bargain.

Complain: Write letters to the editor, call or e-mail radio and television stations. Pressure local media outlets to accurately cover stories. Conversely, thank outlets who do give your group and issues fair coverage.

Investigate: Visit local stations and look at their "public files": the records they must, by law keep, listing how they are complying with meeting community needs, and what complaints they've received. Keep a record of how helpful the staff is.

Document media bias: A report detailing the problems you observe can be invaluable ammunition in holding media outlets accountable. Train volunteers to monitor specific media for a week or two. Then produce and publicize a report detailing your findings along with constructive recommendations for change.

Taking back our power requires action, partners, resources and community building.

Why Media Matters

What do congregations think about online faith?

Congregations use the internet in a variety of ways, including to evangelize and to strengthen the faith of their members. Many believe that the internet has helped faith communities become better places.

Congregational life online	
internet has helped congregational life	83%
e-mails from church staff help spiritual life of congregation	81%
e-mail helps members stay in touch with each other	91%
e-mail helps congregation connect with community	63%
Congregational website features: Percent who say their websites have information that ...	
encourages visitors to attend	75%
includes mission statements, sermons	57%
links to denomination, faith-related sites	43%
includes scripture/devotional material	22%
includes schedules, minutes, internal messages	43%
Cyberspace outreach: Percent who sought religious information online ...	
All U.S. internet users	21%
South	26%
Midwest	22%
West	20%
Northeast	14%