

2006 Conference Communications Survey

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*Communications Resourcing Team
United Methodist Communications*

Highlights

- ‘Director of Communication’ is the most common title assigned to the conference communications leader.
- The average salary of a full-time conference director of communication is \$54,916.
- The top four responsibilities for directors of communication are media relations (92%), communications consulting within conference (93%), website management (90%), and crisis communications planning (90%).
- Two-thirds (66%) of conference communicators are not a member of their annual conference’s extended cabinet.
- The average circulation size of the conference print newspaper is 8,181; the average circulation size of electronic newsletter is 1,528.
- 83% of respondents put out a weekly electronic newsletter; 81% publish a monthly print newspaper.
- Nearly one-fourth of respondents say the conference is *definitely* planning to move to total electronic communication with the clergy, and 39% say the conference probably will not.

Introduction

The priority given communications and the role of the communications director vary to some degree from conference to conference. In a declining number of annual conferences, the Communications Office is seen *only* as a service bureau. In many conferences, communications is viewed as a ministry that plans its work strategically. As seen in results of this survey, the conference director of communications likely has a myriad of roles because communications in and of itself is complicated. Every person, local church, district, and annual conference office communicates in hundreds of ways and has critical communications needs.

In practice, it is the director of communications who is most specifically trained and experienced in mass communications and in religion communications and who can take the lead

in looking at and interpreting the big picture. The conference communicator at his/her best develops, implements, coordinates, evaluates and counsels on overall and specific conference communications strategies.

The mission of the Communications Resourcing Team at United Methodist Communications is to connect annual conferences with communications resources, including to their colleagues and other annual conferences. These connections require knowing what's happening in communications in each annual conference. Therefore, the Communications Resourcing Team periodically conducts a conference communications survey to provide a body of knowledge often requested by conferences and communicators.

The Conference Communications Survey in 2006 focused on the role and relationship of the director of communications by examining assignments, staff and budget size, relationship to bishop and extended cabinet, and the role of print and electronic media in the annual conference. The result is a fairly comprehensive view of the conference communicator in the life of the annual conference.

Method

In mid-2006, the Communications Resourcing Team of the General Commission on Communication (United Methodist Communications) developed a survey instrument to measure the status of conference communications programs with regards to roles, relationships, salaries, and functions. Sixty-three surveys were sent electronically to conference communicators (directors of communication or equivalent) and forty-seven were returned for a response rate of 70%.

The data from these surveys were tabulated and analyzed. The report that follows provides an interpretation of that data.

Demographics of Respondents

As noted above, a total of 47 persons participated in the survey. The jurisdictional breakdown is as follows:

- North Central—7 conferences reporting (out of 12)
- Northeastern—9 conferences (out of 13)
- South Central—11 conferences (out of 15)
- Southeastern—13 conferences (out of 15)
- Western—7 conferences (out of 8)

Titles

An initial indicator of the role and relationship of the conference communicator within the annual conference structure is his/her title. The most common title is Director of Communications (22 respondents) followed by Communications Coordinator (6 respondents).

In six annual conferences the communications function is assigned to the Director of Connectional Ministries. In five annual conferences the Assistant to the Bishop is also the communications director.

Part-Time or Full-Time?

Of the 46 who responded to this particular question, 39 said their position was fulltime and 7 said part-time. While the average amount of time spent by part-time communicators was 17.5 hours a week, it is probably a more accurate assessment of what one person wrote, “Part-time pay, full-time work.”

Staff

The staffs of the Communications Offices are small with the average number of full-time staff being 1.3, and the part-time staff, on average, being 1.6.

Editors and Administrative Assistants lead the list of communications staff supervised by the director, followed by graphic designers, webmasters/web servants, information technology personnel, and volunteers.

Salary and Benefits

The average salary is \$54,916 and the average benefits package is \$23,160. However, it must be noted in some annual conferences dual management roles that include communication lead to a great disparity in salaries and benefits package. Likewise, more respondents tended to report a salary than a benefits package. The salary numbers are fairly reliable, but the benefits packages are not.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that of the salaries reported the minimum salary was \$6,600 for a part-time position and the maximum for full-time was \$88,000. Half of the respondents earn a salary that falls in the range of \$37,158 and \$50,000. Table I shows a breakdown by jurisdiction of the average salary for a conference communicator based on whether a conference communicator is employed full-time or part-time.

TABLE 1: SALARIES OF RESPONDENTS BY STATUS AND JURISDICTION						
	North Central	Northeastern	South Central	Southeastern	Western	UMC
Full-time						
Average	\$58,232	\$47,289	\$52,315	\$65,950	\$53,574	\$54,916
Highest Salary	\$68,757	\$75,200	\$88,000	\$82,926	\$65,474	\$88,000
Lowest Salary	\$47,000	\$32,000	\$25,000	\$40,000	\$27,000	\$25,000
Part-time						
Average	n/a	\$20,502	\$6,600	\$26,500	n/a	\$20,120
Highest Salary	n/a	\$24,000	\$6,600	\$32,000	n/a	\$32,000
Lowest Salary	n/a	\$17,004	\$6,600	\$21,000	n/a	\$6,600
Sample Size	6	9	11	8	5	39

Factors Affecting Salary

In looking at the salary ranges, the question immediately is asked what creates such a range of salaries for these positions? Obviously, conference size and the overall financial health of a conference influence salaries and benefits paid to all staff not just conference communicators.

Beyond that, though, the two most influential factors affecting salary are number of people supervised and position within the conference. The correlation between number of people supervised and salary is very strong (.604) and the correlation between position within the conference and salary is also very strong (.422)¹ This means the more people a conference communicator supervises, the higher his or her salary. Also, the higher the conference communicator's position within the hierarchy of the conference, the higher his or her salary as

¹ For those familiar with statistics and tests of significance, both of these correlations met test of significance qualifications.

well. Table 1 shows some of the influence of salary and people supervised for full-time and part-time communicators.

TABLE 1: CONFERENCE COMMUNICATOR SALARIES BY NUMBER OF FULL-TIME STAFF SUPERVISED		
Number of Full-Time Staff Supervised	Average Salary of Conference Communicator	Sample Size
1	\$51,735	8
4	\$72,963	2
5	\$81,000	2

What Conference Communicators Do

When asked which activities are included in their job descriptions, nine out of ten conference communicators reported media relations (93%); communications consulting within conference (93%); web site management (90%); and crisis communications planning (90%) (See Table 2).

Eight out of ten (85%) reported production of communications for boards, commissions, and committees (brochures, fliers, etc) and nearly eight of ten reported Igniting Ministry campaign support (79%) and supervision of print newspaper/newsletter for membership. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (74%) reported they are responsible for marketing and advertising. Nearly equal percentage (73%) of the respondents reported they are responsible for e-newsletters to clergy and laity.

Seven out of ten (71%) reported they were assigned benevolence interpretations and less than two out of ten (20%) reported being assigned radio programming. Nearly one of out three (29%) were assigned TV programming. Less than 4% reported they work on blogs and video productions.

TABLE 2: CONFERENCE COMMUNICATORS ACTIVITIES	
Activities	Percent Response
Media Relations	93%
Communications Consulting in Annual Conference	93%
Crisis Communications Planning	90%
Web Site	90%
Production of communications for boards, Commissions, committees (Brochures, etc)	85%
Print newspaper/newsletter to membership	81%
Igniting Ministry Campaign or Support	78%
Marketing/Advertising	76%
E-newsletter to clergy	73%
E-newsletter to laity	73%
Benevolence Interpretations	71%
TV Programming	29%
Radio Programming	20%
Other (Blogs, video production)	4%
N=41	

Those whose duties include media relations were asked which media relations they performed. Eight out of ten (85%) reported news releases while seven out of 10 (71%) reported meeting with media reps (see Table 3).

Almost two-thirds (66%) report being a conference spokesperson and nearly six out of ten (59%) report pitching stories. One-third (34%) report maintaining e-news sites and 3% reported crisis management.

TABLE 3: MEDIA RELATIONS UNDERTAKEN BY CONFERENCE COMMUNICATORS	
What Kind of Media Relations Do They Undertake?	Percent Response
News Releases	85%
Meeting with Media Reps	71%
Spokesperson	66%
Pitching Stories	59%
Maintaining e-news site	34%
Other (crisis management)	3%
N=47	

Relationship to the Annual Conference

Placement of the communications position and access to leadership tells a big part of the story of how communications and communicators are viewed within the annual conference. Four in ten of the respondents (41%) stated that they are supervised by the Bishop while over half (54%) are supervised by the Director of Connectional Ministries. A small percentage (5%) report being supervised by either a Director of Mission and Ministry or an Assistant to the Bishop.

Likewise, six in ten respondents (63%) reported the level of their job in the conference structure is that of program director. One-quarter (25%) indicated “Other,” but did not describe further that level, and five persons, or 12%, said Assistant to the Bishop.

Relationship to cabinet

Only 15 conference communicators out of the 41 who responded to the question reported they participate on the annual conference’s extended cabinet, leaving 26 who said they do not serve in that capacity, even though 2004 General Conference passed a recommendation that communicators serve on the extended cabinet. Fifty-nine percent report that the most frequent

way they receive information is a private meeting. Slightly more than half of the respondents (53%) report receiving information via e-mail communications while slightly less than half (46%) report through staff meetings.

Four in ten communicators (44%) report that they “always” have direct access to the bishop for communications planning and other issues while 27% report “usually.” Almost three in ten respondents (29%) report they “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never” have access to the bishop. Of those, e-mail communications (23%) and private meeting (10%) with the bishop is how they get their information.

Media: Print or Electronic?

A big question facing annual conferences is whether to move away from print and move more vigorously to electronic media. From the survey, we see print media are distributed to significantly more people but electronic media are sent more often. The average circulation size of print media is 8,181 and the average circulation size of electronic media was reported as 1,528 (see Table 4).

While circulations size was smaller for electronic publications, the frequency of distribution for electronic publications was higher. Eight out of ten respondents (83%) reported sending electronic newsletters on a weekly basis while only 16% of respondents reported weekly for print publications.

TABLE 4: PRINT NEWSLETTER VERSUS ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER		
	Print Newspaper/Newsletter	Electronic Newsletter
Circulation Size (average)	8181	1528
How frequently do you send it out?		
Weekly	16%	83%
Monthly	81%	14%
Quarterly	3%	3%
Semi-Annually	0%	0%
Annually	0%	0%

Still a Place for Print

Conferences are more likely to go to completely electronic communication with clergy than with laity. Slightly more than one-third of respondents (36%) reported their annual conference communications would either ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ go 100% electronic communications with clergy while one-quarter (25%) of the respondents reported they would either ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ go 100% electronic communications with their laity.

One respondent chose to qualify that 100% by saying, “We are 100% electronic with our communication to both clergy and laity—that is if you do not include mailing of brochures about upcoming events and the like.” And, while some noted that they had discontinued their print publications because they were no longer effective, others pointed out “There is still a place for print since electronic cannot do everything. We just have to understand what print does best and strategize to its strengths.”

TABLE 5: ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS WITH CLERGY AND LAITY		
	Electronic Communications With Clergy	Electronic Communications With Laity
Definitely will go 100% electronic	23%	15%
Probably will go 100% electronic	13%	10%
Might or might not	18%	26%
Probably will not go 100% electronic	39%	31%
Definitely will not go 100% electronic	8%	18%

Paying for Print

Of the 29 respondents to the question “Is your conference newspaper self-sustaining?”, only one individual reported “yes, it is self-sustaining” and that sustenance comes through subscriptions. The remaining 28 respondents noted that their conference newspaper is supported through apportionments (50%), conference budget (32%), or communications budget (18%).

Small, Rural Nature of Conferences Hinders Electronics

In some instances, the large number of small membership rural churches hinders attempts at achieving 100% electronic format. As one person wrote, “The diversity of our audience and their electronic capabilities would make it unlikely we would go 100% electronic.” Likewise, another stated, “Not every church in our Conference has a computer or is online. Others have acknowledged that rural challenges in general (not having adequate phone lines) make using the Internet more of a nuisance for them than a convenience.”

Yet, Conferences Innovative to Meet Technological Needs

Nevertheless, some conferences had approached this lack of hardware/software needs in innovative ways. Our conference has created a “technology co-op” for churches upgrading or needing hardware, said one communicator.

“The goal is to identify who needs what in the connection, and if a church or organization or individual is upgrading, it may donate their older equipment to others in need . . . the conference helps in the transition, by offering help with software upgrades (TechShop through United Methodist Communications) and other issues. We have already provided an official e-mail address for every one serving a local church, centralizing our database and information system.”

Igniting Ministry

Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents reported that the Conference Communications Office is expected to deliver marketing programs or direct advertising efforts (such as Igniting Ministry) to support church programs and ministries.

One respondent noted that his/her conference participates in the Igniting Ministry Matching Grants program and purchases \$80,000 in advertising annually, depending on matching fund availability. Another respondent commented “Our Igniting Ministry program has included cinema ads, television and radio spots, billboards, and grants to churches.”

Impact of Changes in Staff, Budgets, and Demographics on Conference Communications

Based on the responses, budget cuts appear to have the most influence over the next two years on conference communications programming (see Table 6). Demographic changes will also have some influence while staff cutbacks are not expected to have that much influence on conference communications programming.

	No Influence	A Little Influence	Some Influence	A Lot of Influence	NA
Staff Cutbacks	51%	8%	14%	19%	8%
Budget Cuts	25%	11%	22%	36%	6%
Demographic Changes	17%	14%	28%	33%	8%

Staff

Two-thirds (68%) reported no change in communications staff over the past year. Equal percentages (16%) report having lost full-time equivalent staff and report having increased full-time equivalent staff.

One respondent noted that “for the first time in more than 20 years, we have actually talked about the possibility of adding personnel in the area of communications and developing a communications system. We hope this would empower the leadership of our conference to be creative and effective in the realm of communications.” Another respondent noted, however, that “If there are staff cutbacks, it will be me and there won’t be a communications program.”

Budgets

Over the past two years, conference communications budgets have stayed the same for 46% of the responding annual conferences. Nearly 3 in 10 (28%) decreased and one-quarter (25%) increased.

Demographic Changes

The focus of the respondents on demographic changes was not so much on the changing racial/ethnic composition but rather the shift from a print media culture to an electronic one. “Our print readership is declining while our web and electronic usage is increasing,” wrote one respondent. “Younger audiences tend to want things electronically. Older audiences who are more comfortable with print media prefer that or both print and electronic.”

A similar situation led another respondent to remark, “Regarding demographic changes, there is a tension between reaching existing Luddite constituents [someone who opposes technological innovation] and the church’s desire to reach younger people with the Gospel, which means new paradigms in everything we do.”

The shift from print to electronic media can be seen in changes in communications budget by item. Over half of the respondents noted that websites (61%) and web support (51%) had received increases in their budgeted amounts while slightly more than one-third of the respondents (37%) reported that newspapers had decreased their budgeted amounts. Clearly, the demographic shift from print to electronic media is having its impact on budgets.

TABLE 7: CHANGES IN COMMUNICATIONS BUDGET BY ITEM				
	Increased	Decreased	Stay the Same	Not Applicable
Web Sites	61%	5%	29%	5%
Web Support	51%	5%	29%	14%
Training	21%	18%	50%	11%
Newspapers	21%	37%	29%	13%
Travel	16%	24%	48%	13%
Other Programs	10%	40%	23%	27%
E-Newsletters	9%	6%	60%	26%
Advertising/Marketing	6%	22%	50%	22%
TV Programs	6%	9%	23%	63%
Radio Programs	3%	8%	25%	64%

Evaluating Effectiveness of Communications Programs

Evaluating the effectiveness of communication programs does not seem to follow any set pattern or strategic plan. Many respondents stated that “informal feedback” was the most common way to assess the effectiveness of communication. Some of the more notable “informal

feedback” were responses from intended audiences, conference staff, cabinet, and commission communications. Others rely on anecdotal evidence, especially from clergy and lay leadership. Others based it on number of e-mail subscriptions and website hits. One respondent stated they based their assessments on answering two important questions, “Are we helping other ministries meet their stated goals? Are we helping to provide local churches with resources they need?”

Others state they have developed periodic surveys and measurable objectives in their conference plans. In addition to surveys, conferences use focus groups and communications audits. “We finished a communications audit in 2005,” commented one respondent. We’re using those results and we’re adding an ongoing effectiveness research program using our web-based survey tool and other methods.”

Effective Communications

Print newsletters and newspapers along with e-mail, e-mail newsletters, and websites ranked among the most effective communications used by annual conferences. One respondent commented that their website is registering more and more users every month while another respondent noted that “closing down the conference print shop and applying those resources in other places” was a good move for their conference.

Another respondent noted that “targeted e-mail has created more readership and more responses than print communications.” Yet, another noted that “timely stories done from around our churches and outside the conference are sent as a news brief to a growing list of subscribers, who in turn link to our website for longer form stories complete with photos and additional info links.”

The shift from print to electronic media has, in the words of many respondents, enabled conference communications offices to communicate instantly. Conference communicators noted

that they are able to involve even the smallest churches through stories. Whereas in the past print media focused on national level news releases, electronic media has enabled conference communicators to focus on the local annual conference.

Other respondents noted that electronic media is low-cost with wide and potentially instantaneous distribution. Further, websites bring the communication from the conference level down to the church level. “Something,” wrote one respondent, “that has been lacking for many years.”

Yet, electronic media does have its problems. As one respondent remarked, “Most people receive it, but you can’t make everyone open it.” However, this person continued, “The items in the e-newsletter are shorter, so I think they stand a better chance of being read. They are easily forwarded by those who make the effort to do so and easily cut-and-pasted into bulletins for those who make the effort to do so.”

The electronic media, for many respondents, creates direct communication with the conference members. Further, electronic media has various options, such as web casts/videoconferencing, RSS and podcasting, which many believe can only enhance the electronic communications of the conference.

Conclusion

What does the future hold for conference communicators and conference communication offices? Here are what three respondents said in their final comments:

“Conference communications people can increase their value to the church by being more than technicians who tell stories (package information). They should move beyond the journalistic concept of reporting on statements or actions of others. Conference communicators need to be strategic change agents involved in shaping ministries. Communicators can help

mold actions/statements, create news and shape perceptions (which become reality). In that way we return to our historic roots as propagandists (helping to propagate the faith).”

“The two greatest challenges I face are (1) Making the best use of the various communications media. Our conference assumed there would be a “paperless” society. I believe what we really must do is recognize that each medium has its strengths and to strategize how to use those strengths. In the meantime, negotiating the quickly-changing (and quickly exploited) new technologies is really a big challenge. A related challenge: communicating to a constituency that has a widely ranging comfort with or even accessibility to newer technologies. Some folks want the most updated technology; some folks have very slow internet service; and (2) the other great challenge is strategizing how to get our stories covered. The best I can tell is that if one of our stories coincides with a corresponding larger story, ours will be covered as a sidebar. But if that larger story is not happening, our story would not be covered.

“Conference communications needs to be a much higher priority in staffing, budgeting, and planning, but the culture in our conference has always prevented a really effective communications program. Things are better now than they use to be, but we still have a long way to go. I think not having the communicator involved in the planning stages of programs may be the biggest weakness.”

ADDENDUM

Unedited Comments from Communicators

Which communications strategies do you consider to be the successful in your conference? Why?

- Web, newspaper, and print are doing excellent work
- Website because we have more and more users every month
- Right now, I will have to say that anything I did is more successful than it was.
- Closing down the conference print shop and applying those resources in other places. Going to a content management web site linked in to a flexible, web-based database; using one theme and logo for the entire quadrennium to tie the conferences priorities and events. More e-mail and handouts, lots fewer mailings..
- Targeted e-mail: more readership and more responses than print communications
- Working with ministry teams to help them develop a communication plan.
- Instant Connection—weekly E-newsletter; cnumc.org website; communications workshops. Instant connection is consistently lifted up throughout the conference connection as an effective way of connecting churches together. Timely stories done from around our churches and outside the conference are sent as a news brief to a growing list of subscribers, who in turn link to our website for longer form stories complete with photos and additional info links. The cnumc.org website is providing commissions and committees with ways to connect their individual consistencies. In addition, the website provides online registration for Annual Conference Session, which has reduced the cost of print materials for ACS. The website also serves as a clearinghouse for information about UMS in the connection. Communications workshops are for developing newsletters, websites, working with media, etc.
- We are now able to communicate instantly and this is sensational. We are involving even the smallest churches through stories and this is sensational. Previously, most of the stories used in the paper were national level news releases. Now almost all of the stories are local annual conference centered and we could easily use twice as much paper space as we have.
- Multiple, tiered e-mail lists; slick newsletter for person in pews; barebones plain paper newsletter for conference lay and clergy leadership; website commonly-asked-for resources for download, etc. Why? Low-cost, wide, and potentially instantaneous distribution; the colorful pew-oriented piece is attractive and focuses on conference activities/mission.
- I believe the crisis communications will be a wonderful tool when it has been updated. I also believe our new website will bring the communication from the conference level down to the local church level that has been lacking for many years.
- Efforts based on two-step flow. These strategies indirectly shape opinion or prompt actions by targeting opinion leaders. They, in turn, influence more general audience

members. These indirect efforts often work more effectively than direct promotions because two-step flow capitalizes on personal relationships and cuts through message clutter.

- E-mailing. Most people receive it. You can't make everyone open it, but the items in the e-newsletter are shorter, so I think they stand a better chance of being read. They are easily forwarded by those who make the effort to do so and easily cut-and-pasted into bulletins for those who make the effort to do so. Interestingly, though, some of our folks have.
- Frequently updated website, weekly e-newsbytes, and a redesigned print format. We have also made it a value to read as many local church newsletters and bulletins we have access to, find out what local churches are writing and announcing, not to mention needing.
- We're trying to train our conference leaders that targeting their communications will be effective.
- Our conference mission is to boldly make disciples through resourcing local churches, so that is where we place a lot of emphasis. Direct communication with members, conference e-mail newsletters including two written by the bishop, which are very popular, are our two most effective means of communicating.
- Increasingly personal and current communication, in a variety of standard forms as well as newer means, such as RSS and Podcasting, enhancing electronic communication and web meetings as well as a future strategy for webcasting/video conferencing, while maintaining print media, such as the quarterly magazine and supportive brochures. Converging the connections enhances both the affective and informational domains.
- In our current reorganizations, we've tried to explain the implications of the initiatives to fund and redistrict in a variety of channels.
- Conference newspaper still has wide acceptance. Website interest is increasing. Everyone who receives e-mail news loves it.
- E-mail contact and web is increasing in popularity. Most ministry teams now understand the reasonableness of posting forms and other conference information online. However, it will be a huge step to do online data submission, which is currently under development. There is also a need to acknowledge the power of communications outside the church, using contemporary techniques. The Communications Office is too small to offer much hands-on support to the local church. However, we do try to resource them as much as possible.
- Electronic newsletter and website because they connect, are immediate, and organize a stream of information.
- We're trying to train our Conference leaders that targeting their communications will be effective.
- Our e-newsletter with e-links has been very successful and our loose-leaf packet that can be distributed to various leader, duplicated and posted seems to work very well for us. The other thing that has made a huge difference for us is implementing a unified database and content management system for both web and database. We use Brick River Technologies.

- We have been very successful with Igniting Ministry in those areas where congregations have welcomed training and support. We do a good job of telling the stories of Shared Ministries in a variety of ways which works well for us where we have developed partnerships with clergy and/or laity who help promote the print, multi-media, and web resources. We are currently in a rebuilding of the Communications Ministry Team and re-evaluation of how and where we tell the stories.
- Several years ago the conference did a communications audit. We have implemented almost all of the suggested strategies in that report. The most successful communications efforts involve increased attention to web and electronic based information, better media relations, and more effective use of technology and training (DVD) production for various groups telling their story.
- Our print and e-newsletters have always been highly valued. We have been very successful in crisis management, but unable to convince the conference (mainly bishop) in developing a full-fledged crisis plan.
- To date, the newspaper is our most appealing product. However, there are still many people who aren't reading it. Brick River recently reported to the Conference Information Technology Director that the Texas Conference page received more hits than any other Conference page it supports in November (77,000 hits.) However, the web site is truly under construction and the perception seems to be that it reaches a very select audience.

Please add any other comments regarding conference communications you may wish to make:

- With the increasing use of electronic communications (e-mail, web) our people are feeling much more connected than before an in this 3-state areas, that's important and difficult to attain.
- Our print and e-newsletters have always been highly valued. We have been very successful in crisis communications management, but unable to convince the conference (mainly bishop) in developing a full-fledged crisis plan.
- Conference communications people can increase their value to the church by being more than technicians who tell stories (package information). They should move beyond the journalistic concept of reporting on statements or actions of others. Conference communicators need to be strategic change agents involved in shaping ministries. Communicators can help mold actions/statements, create news and shape perceptions (which become reality). In that way we return to our historic roots as propagandists (helping to propagate the faith).
- The two greatest challenges I face: (1) Making the best use of the various communications media. Our conference assumed there would be a "paperless" society. I believe what we really must do is recognize that each medium has its strengths and to strategize how to use those strengths. In the meantime, negotiating the quickly-changing (and quickly exploited) new technologies is really a big challenge. A related challenge: communicating to constituencies with a wide range of comfort with or even accessibility

to newer technologies. Some folks want the most updated technology; some folks have very slow internet service; (2) the other great challenge is strategizing how to get our stories covered. The best I can tell is that if one of our stories coincides with a corresponding larger story, ours will be covered as a sidebar. But if that larger story is not happening, our story would not be covered. I'd like to know strategies. In the meantime, I am very interested in UCom's convergence model and am trying to apply it to my smaller situation.

- We are trying to make communications a concern for every staff member of the conference. Even those who just answer the phones, we would like to find out, what people are calling about. That way, we become sensitive to the needs of those who call the conference office. Executive staff are made aware of what is going on by regular monthly meeting that gives as much information about other ministries.
- Conference communications needs to be a much higher priority in staffing, budgeting, and planning, but the culture in our Conference has always prevented a really effective communications program. Things are better now than they use to be, but we still have a long way to go. I think not having the communicator involved in the planning stages of programs may be the biggest weakness.
- Direct contact with the stories of our conference, either in meeting settings or through minutes had diminished for the Director of Communications in recent years. This has negatively impacted communications on a number of levels. It is my hope this will change as our new ministry team does their work. We could be doing so much more, but resources continue to dwindle and I think we are losing contact with the persons in the pews as a result.