

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
AT THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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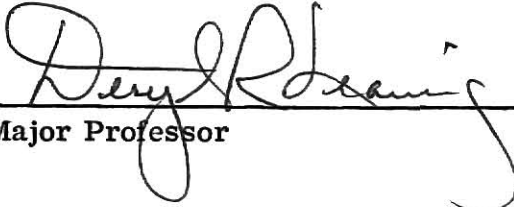
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INTRODUCTION

The Assemblies of God, officially named "The General Council of the Assemblies of God," is young as denominations in the United States go. This church, Protestant and conservative in its Christian theology, was organized at a founding eleven-day meeting in April, 1914, in an opera house near Bath House Row in the Arkansas resort city of Hot Springs.

During the past fifty-five years the Assemblies of God has grown steadily, spectacularly at times, since its pre-World War I founding convention. An estimated 200 or 300 evangelists and pastors,¹ many of whom were well educated, were delegates and visitors to the founding meeting. They attended as representatives of established independent churches with memberships consisting of individuals converted in the Pentecostal revival which began about the turn of the century. Many of these ministers had left some of the larger Protestant denominations to form an organization of churches where the ministers and members could worship in the Pentecostal mode which has tended to be, but not necessarily, demonstrative and emotional.

In the fifty-five-year period from 1914 to 1969, the holiness-oriented (no drinking, smoking, etc.) Assemblies of God has emerged from a small "strictly

¹Facts and Figures on the Assemblies of God (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, June, 1969), p. 1.

cooperative fellowship" to a moderately-centralized denomination² with 17,026 ordained and licensed ministers,³ 8,570 local churches, 626,660 adult (age sixteen and over) members who hold to the denomination's Pentecostal beliefs and practices, and a Sunday school enrollment of about 1,100,000.⁴

By the 1940's when many national churches in the United States were inaugurating organized public relations programs, the leadership of the Assemblies of God was only beginning to devote some salient thought to the necessity for and feasibility of instituting such a department. In that decade the denomination's Executive Presbytery was principally concerned with opening new churches and expanding an already ambitious world missions program. Ten years passed before a somewhat belated decision was reached to authorize and start a formalized public relations program.

The author, who served as a public relations writer for the denomination for three and one-half years beginning in February, 1965, traces in the thesis the background, history, growth, and development of the Assemblies of God public relations program from the mid-1940's through and including 1969.

From its founding on June 7, 1954, through December 31, 1969, the

²Many Assemblies of God leaders abhor reference to their church as being a denomination since that term symbolizes to them what they believe are the negative aspects of denominationalism from which they feel they were converted.

³Ordained ministers are permitted to officiate at water baptismal and communion services, and funerals and weddings. Licensed ministers may not. Both types are eligible to preach and hold pastorates.

⁴Facts and Figures on the Assemblies of God, loc. cit.

Assemblies Public Relations Department has had two executive directors and three department heads. The Reverend Ralph M. Riggs, now retired and residing in Santa Cruz, California, was the first executive director, serving from 1954 through January, 1956. The second is the Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, now in his late fifties and in his tenth year as general superintendent of the denomination. Zimmerman, labeled a "charismatic statesman" by Assemblies' historian William W. Menzies,⁵ has served as the department's director since January, 1956. The ministers who have served as head of the department include the Reverend Harry M. Myers, now of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who was in charge from June, 1954, through January, 1956; the Reverend Carl G. Conner, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, January, 1956, through March, 1966; and the Reverend Warren F. McPherson, Springfield, Missouri, June, 1966, to the present. The author has devoted one chapter each to Myers, Conner, and McPherson for two reasons: (1) each has helped guide the expansion and development of the department, and (2) their tenures make natural divisions for the history contained in the thesis.

A presentation is made of the leadership styles, personalities and interests, and particular types of programs emphasized by each of the department heads. The author and interested present and past associates of Myers, Conner, and McPherson at the Assemblies of God International Headquarters, have attempted to evaluate from differing perspectives the work, performance, and contributions of each.

⁵William W. Menzies, "The Assemblies of God: 1941-1967 The Consolidation of a Revival Movement," (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Iowa, 1968), p. 204.

Research Methods Utilized

Most information contained in the thesis was obtained by means of personal associations and interviews with present and past executive officers of the Assemblies of God, management personnel at the headquarters, and members of the Public Relations Department. Additional material was gleaned from departmental records and publications, the minutes and departmental reports to the biennial business conventions (General Councils) of the denomination, miscellaneous records, reports, periodicals, brochures, and books.

Distance was a problem for some interviews. In these cases tape-recorded personal letters in answer to questionnaires drafted by the author were sought to provide some vital items of information. The majority of the personal interviews took place in Springfield. A cassette tape recorder was utilized for accuracy in chronicling answers to questions as well as for ease in interviewing.

Importance and Values of the Study

Since the early 1940's, more and more non-profit organizations, including many national churches and religious agencies and bodies, have concentrated more time and effort on the practice of public relations. One such organization is the Assemblies of God.

Inasmuch as there has been considerable increase in the amount of journalistic practice devoted to public relations and its related activities on behalf of churches and religious agencies in the United States, a history of the Assemblies of

God publications program is of importance. Few historical theses or dissertations on church public relations have been completed. The dearth of advanced research in this area may be due to the relatively recent utilization of modern public relations tools and techniques by churches and religious groups.

An historical study of the Assemblies' program, quite obviously, contributes to the body of research concerning church public relations. The thesis is a source upon which journalism and public relations educators, researchers, and practitioners may choose to draw upon to cite how one national-level church public relations operation was established and developed. For national church bodies and religious-oriented agencies interested in initiating an organized public relations program, the thesis can be used as an approximate guide upon which they might plan or organize their program. However, the author does not suggest that the Assemblies' program is a model church public relations operation. The thesis may also be of some assistance to other non-profit and governmental organizations beginning organized programs of public relations.

The author contends that it is important for the study to have been conducted at the present time or within the next five to ten years. If it were to be attempted in 1990, for example, some key individuals directly involved in or associated with the establishment and development of the department would not be available to help the researcher chart its history as precisely. A case in point is Zimmerman, the dynamic general superintendent and executive director of public relations. He has been a forceful figure who has helped guide the public relations program from 1956 through 1969, utilizing his influence as top officer in the denomination both in the

forefront and behind the scenes. As of December 31, 1969, he was fifty-eight years of age. Twenty years hence he and other key sources to be interviewed would be deceased or that much older and perhaps more removed from the exacting details and main factors which have been helpful in conducting the study.

It is worthwhile to note that with the passage of time, some key historical records often tend to become lost, misplaced, or discarded.

Limitations

The scope of the study is confined to the history of the department including its founding, establishment, and development. The author places emphasis upon a presentation of his views and those of Assemblies of God leadership. He maintains that these observers have been in advantageous positions for closely observing and achieving a broader understanding of more of the totality of the department's history than have been external sources who have witnessed only small segments. In addition, much of the department's functional responsibility has been and is related to servicing internal publics of the Assemblies of God, many of these publics conducting operations at the denomination's headquarters.

As for programs of the department directed to external publics of the Assemblies of God, the majority of these efforts have been concerned with the dissemination of information in the form of news releases and printed pamphlets, booklets, and brochures of a factual nature.

Background

At the denomination's founding meeting in 1914, there apparently was considerable inclination to organize local church government along Congregational and Presbyterian lines. In the "Preamble and Resolution on Constitution" adopted at Hot Springs, delegates "set forth principles of equality, unity, and cooperation, guaranteed the sovereignty of each local affiliated church, and provided a basis of co-operative fellowship for both ministers and congregations."⁶

The 8,570 autonomous local churches of the Assemblies of God, varying in membership from twenty to 1,500, continue to form the denomination's broad base. The General Council, consisting of all ordained ministers of the denomination and one lay delegate from each recognized church in attendance, convenes biennially in various major cities across the United States. It is the highest constitutional authority in the Assemblies of God.⁷

The General Presbytery is the next national-level body in order of authority in Assemblies of God government. This body (all ordained ministers) is composed of three elected representatives from each of the forty-seven district councils into which local churches are organized, sixteen members of the Executive Presbytery, and three representatives from each of four foreign missions fields. The General Presbytery schedules legislation for consideration during General Council business

⁶Klaude Kendrick, The Promise Fulfilled (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), p. 86.

⁷Ibid., p. 87.

sessions. The constitution lists the duties and powers of this body:

The General Presbytery shall be empowered to act in all matters pertaining to foreign missionary and ministerial relationships, and all matters which pertain to the proper functioning of the departments and institutions of the fellowship. It shall constitute an advisory body to the Executive Presbytery. All decisions pertaining to constitutional order or fundamental doctrines shall be referred by it to the General Council for ratification.⁸

The Executive Presbytery serves under the direction of the General Presbytery and oversees the operation of the headquarters in Springfield. The eight executive officers (general superintendent, five assistant general superintendents, general secretary, and general treasurer) of the Assemblies of God are members of the Executive Presbytery and maintain offices at the headquarters. The remaining eight members of the body do not reside in Springfield and are elected to represent the various geographical areas of the nation.

Activities of the headquarters are divided into departments which have been organized to serve local churches, ministers, and the denomination as a whole. Each of the eight executive officers has a portfolio calling for him to supervise one or more departments. Each officer serves as the department's executive director, assisted by a national secretary or head with another appropriate title who manages day-to-day operations.

The departments (See organizational charts on pages 127-8) include Benevolences, Christ's Ambassadors (youth), Church School Literature, Education, Finance, Foreign Missions, General Services (Public Relations, Personnel, Purchasing,

⁸Ibid., pp. 88-9.

Communications, and Maintenance), Gospel Publishing House, Home Missions, Men's Fellowship, Radio, Sunday School, and Women's Missionary Council.⁹

The 8,570 local churches are organized into districts. These normally follow state boundaries but may only include a portion of a state or, in some instances, more than one state.

Though each church is self-governing, the district organizations grant licenses and ordain ministers. The international organization, through its biennial General Council and/or through its elected officers, sets general policy and performs national and world wide ministries of the church.¹⁰

The headquarters is supported by free-will offerings from Assemblies of God ministers and churches. In earlier years ordained ministers were asked to increase their monthly contribution to \$1.50 and in 1955 to \$2.00. Licensed ministers have been giving \$1.00 a month. These funds continue to be supplemented by free-will offerings and church contributions. Income from the Gospel Publishing House which sells literature to the denomination's churches and some 3,400 other non-Assemblies of God churches is utilized to defray expenses of several departments, Public Relations being one. Some departments such as Foreign Missions and Radio are supported entirely by free-will offerings.¹¹

The Gospel Publishing House, a printing plant with approximately 100,000 square feet of floor space, produces more than eleven tons of literature each day.

⁹Many Members . . . One Body (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1967), p. 3.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹Kendrick, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Facilities, equipment, and land of the headquarters and GPH are valued at more than \$6,000,000. Some 630 full-time workers are employed at the headquarters, including GPH. About eighty-five percent of the workers are from Assemblies of God churches.

There are 11,459 ordained ministers and 5,567 licensed ministers, or almost two ministers for each local church. Nine arts and sciences and ministerial training colleges are maintained by the denomination.¹² The ministerial colleges are adopting more of an arts and sciences-orientation at the present time.

Public Relations, as part of the General Services Department, serves all the departments in publicizing their programs, activities, and personnel. The department also serves as a general informational outlet for the denomination. Work of the department is carried out by a staff of thirteen persons including the department head.

The department head also has served as circulation manager for the nine Assemblies of God magazines since 1959. He supervises three assistants, one each in audio-visual, circulation fulfillment and promotion, and public relations. The headquarters' building receptionist is a member of the department. Public Relations also has an office secretary, three clerical workers, and a part-time tour guide.

¹²Facts and Figures, loc. cit.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public relations, variously defined since the term was coined about the turn of the twentieth century, is a profession very much in its historical infancy. Like most new professions, the public relations field has yet to refine in the thinking of the general public what services and functions its practitioners perform. As seems to be the case with professions like engineering, the professional aims, goals, techniques and practices are not widely understood or agreed upon by educators and practitioners in the field, much less the general public. However, many attempts have been made since the term public relations came into common usage during the middle decades of the century to draft a widely accepted definition.

One attempt was made by Sidney Kobre, professor of journalism and public relations at Florida State University, who developed a rather simplistic definition. He termed public relations "an organized, systematic activity which seeks to build goodwill, morale, cooperation and support among the publics of an organization through two-way communications." He suggested that public relations should be organized and systematic "to produce any solid, lasting results." Kobre noted that public relations, unfortunately, is usually practiced on a casual basis by most groups. As a professional activity public relations has been characterized by the "organized study and regular application of its principles to a problem." Elaborating,

Kobre pointed out that "without goodwill no organization can continue long. Cooperation is essential for companies, for non-profit groups as well as for governmental bodies." Kobre summarized,

More than one public is involved, because every organization has both internal and external groups or 'publics' which must be considered in any well-rounded, full program of public relations. Two-way communication is vital because the organization not only beams out a message but also desires feedback to discover how its organization, staff, and product are being accepted, and to find out what adjustments are necessary for the organization to improve its operations and adjust to a changing world.¹

Bertrand R. Canfield, author of a widely distributed university and college textbook on public relations, also defined the term:

Public relations is a philosophy of management expressed in policies and practices which serve the public interest. It is also a function of management which appraises public opinion and devises and executes communications which interpret an institution's policies and actions to the public to secure its understanding and goodwill.²

Canfield included another definition of public relations, very limited in scope, in his introductory textbook. He conceded that it was not as inclusive as the above definition. The second one, typical of the many less precise descriptions of the term, was "good public relations means doing the right thing, at the right time, and at the right place." The second definition, he cautioned, wrongly "assumes that public relations is simply doing good and ignores its essential function of telling the public what is being done to satisfy its interests. The doing is not enough, the

¹Sidney Kobre, Dynamic Force of Public Relations Today (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown, 1964), p. 10.

²Bertrand R. Canfield, Public Relations: Principles, Cases, and Problems (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1960), pp. 18-9.

public must also understand what is being done for its benefit."³

Professor Edward J. Robinson of Boston University's journalism faculty particularized his definition in terms of "public relations as an applied social and behavioral science." His definition, like Canfield's first one, suggested that an organized, professional public relations program ought to include utilization of valid attitude and opinion measurement techniques, not merely the dispensing of pertinent information to the various publics:

1. Measures, evaluates, and interprets the attitudes of various relevant publics;
2. Assists management in defining objectives for increasing public understanding and acceptance of the organization's product, plans, policies, and personnel;
3. Equates these objectives with the interests, needs, and goals of the various relevant publics; and
4. Develops, executes and evaluates a program to earn public understanding and acceptance.⁴

Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, in their popular textbook Effective Public Relations, likewise described public relations as a four-step process: research-listening, planning-decision making, communication, and evaluation.

Cutlip and Center elaborated upon how the process functions in practice:

Organized practice is the continuing effort to bring about a harmonious adjustment between an institution and its publics. This adjustment requires, among other things, exchange of opinions and information. This doesn't just happen in today's complex society. It must be planned and provided for. This is the practitioner's job. He serves, in turn, the role of listener, counselor, communicator, and evaluator in this process.⁵

³Canfield, loc. cit.

⁴Edward J. Robinson, Communication and Public Relations (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1966), pp. 51-2.

⁵Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1958), p. 91.

What Public Relations Is Not

There are many persons who mistakenly identify advertising, promotion and publicity as being synonymous with public relations. This is an illustration of the limited, partially erroneous understanding of public relations which many individuals have acquired. The organized program of public relations, as Cutlip and Center have advocated, will most often include some or all of the above communication techniques.⁶

Publicity and public relations are not synonymous terms. However, public relations practitioners tend to employ publicity techniques extensively in their daily professional activities. More precisely, publicity is "the approach an organization makes to the general public, seeking to create a favorable feeling." As with publicity, practitioners frequently utilize promotion which is "the approach an organization makes to its own membership in the development of loyalty and support . . . publicity and promotion tend to overlap."⁷ Advertising is another term often interpreted by many individuals as having the same meaning as public relations. Unlike publicity which is published or transmitted without charge by the mass media of communications, advertising is "any paid form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, and services by an identified sponsor."⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Lemuel Petersen, "Church Develops Public Relations," Quill, July-August, 1946, p. 10.

⁸Otto Kleppner, Advertising Procedure (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 571.

Widespread understanding of the term public relations has been diminished to a significant degree because practitioners in the field have not grasped "its nature and functions." With misguided zeal workers specializing in public relations have unfortunately presented grossly oversimplified descriptions. Outside observers of public relations have been guilty of the same practice in writing concerning the field. Practitioners and outside observers alike have portrayed public relations in such glowing phraseology as moral force, new social philosophy, or as an art. Canfield supports the argument that oversimplified definitions of the term have been a partial cause for the misunderstanding. He holds that public relations is neither the "engineering of consent" or an "invisible sell," nor the "cunning manipulation of minds, but the straightforward presentation of facts from which the public can form its own opinions."⁹

Canfield also contends that "good public relations is not something which can be attained quickly" because he has learned that a sound program requires long-term, systematic activity aimed at gaining "the confidence and respect of people" He stresses that "public relations is not a specialized function of business" but the "responsibility of all persons" associated with an organization. He also candidly admits that "public relations cannot serve as a substitute for good management or a cure-all for poor policies, products, or services." Likewise he rightly observes that public relations rarely means "spending extravagant sums for entertaining"¹⁰

⁹Canfield, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 19-20.

Though the public relations field has tended to be largely misunderstood, it has come to be "an important function of management" in many areas of the world. Extensive growth of public relations has occurred not only in the United States, but also in Europe, the British Isles, the Orient, and in "many smaller countries where public relations practitioners have established professional associations to promote a better understanding and use of public relations."¹¹

Tools of Public Relations

In a well-organized program of public relations, the practitioner "utilizes the printed word, the spoken word, and the image. He uses three means of communication: personal contact, controlled media, and public media."

The practitioner of public relations must make, develop, and cultivate personal contacts. He also must rely on the news media to relay his messages to the general public and "for space and time in these media, he competes against all comers on terms set by the media."

The controlled media such as house publications, manuals and handbooks, letters and bulletins, are called "controlled" because the practitioner generally has complete supervision of content. He can present messages through these media which he feels most accurately reflect his employer's policies and viewpoints.

In addition to the printed media, the spoken word and imagery are tools which are at the disposal of the practitioner. Public address systems, meetings,

¹¹Ibid., p. 22.

speakers' bureaus, and the grapevine are some of the typical uses of the spoken word. When an image is needed to present information, he can utilize "motion pictures, slide films, closed circuit TV, displays and exhibits, events, staged events."¹²

Why Public Relations for Churches?

A scriptural admonition and justification for the contemporary practice of public relations for churches is found in the New Testament: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."¹³ Monsignor John E. Kelly, also citing biblical directives, has recalled that "our Lord decried the hiding of light under a bushel, and enjoined the preaching of the good news from the housetops. Neither He, nor St. Paul, nor any zealot for souls had such a view of Church public relations" whereby the press would have to come to them for a news story.¹⁴

Stewart Harrall, the late journalism and public relations educator at the University of Oklahoma, commented on the present-day role and function of church public relations:

Leaders of religious groups cannot ignore the power of public opinion. Just as people make vivid or negative impressions on others, so does an institution. Unless the powers of the church are favorably impressed on the public consciousness, eventually the church will suffer in decreased support

¹²Cutlip and Center, p. 152.

¹³Matt. 5:16.

¹⁴George Kelley, "Into the Market Place," America, October 6, 1962, p. 841.

and understanding. Either a church is 'a city . . . set on an hill,' that 'cannot be hid,' or it may be like salt that has 'lost its savor.'¹⁵

Affirming Harrall's position, Donald R. Booz of the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints contended in his master's thesis at Boston University that "it is obvious that the church's mission and a program of public relations are inextricably related. The church--the instrument for proclaiming the message of religious thought; the public--all men everywhere to whom that message is directed."¹⁶

The Reverend Malcolm Boyd, Episcopalian chaplain-at-large to American University students and author of the book, Are You Running With Me Jesus? argued that churches need to utilize the best "devices of our time in bringing His gospel to people who desperately need it."¹⁷ George Kelley, a Roman Catholic writer, declared that "the Church cannot afford to fumble, it is bidding for souls!"¹⁸

Professor Roland Wolseley of Syracuse University's journalism faculty who is opposed to haphazard, unorganized communications programs, stressed that "it is not enough to conceive of church public relations as the buying of advertising space or time, as printing a bulletin or parish paper, or as sending news stories to newspaper and radio stations." He indicated that these are important but that "the church

¹⁵Stewart Harrall, "P. R. for Religion and Religious Groups," Public Relations Handbook, ed., Philip Lesley (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 370.

¹⁶Donald R. Booz, "Public Relations Programs of National Churches in the United States," (unpublished Master's thesis, Boston University, 1962), p. 23.

¹⁷Malcolm Boyd, "Crossroads in Mass Evangelism," Christian Century, March 20, 1957, p. 359.

¹⁸Kelley, op. cit., p. 841.

can and should do still more, through planning."¹⁹

Churches no longer can assume that their role and services are understood by their publics, Harrall warned. "It is of vital importance that people know the full truth about churches--their problems, objectives, services and organization." To succeed requires the support and understanding of the people. Leaders of present-day churches, Harrall argued, must see to it that the churches are understood now, not sometime in the near or distant future.²⁰

To coordinate and solidify their public relations activities, church leaders need to continue to call upon "trustworthy ecclesiastical and journalistic counselors."²¹ Public relations personnel have become necessary due to factors at work in our economic system. These factors include the church's lack of continual, face-to-face interaction with its people; development of a complex mass media network of communication; rapid growth of the church which has become subject of much criticism; increased need for support; and a more well-read, sophisticated public which demands more information.²²

All major church organizations have a public relations program. Some are organized. Some are not. Some programs are operated at higher levels of effective-

¹⁹Roland E. Wolseley, Interpreting the Church through Press and Radio (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1951), pp. 11-12.

²⁰Harrall, op. cit., pp. 370-2.

²¹"When to Speak and When Not to Speak," Christian Century, May 1, 1957, p. 549.

²²Charles S. Steinberg, The Mass Communicators (New York: Harper and Bros., 1950), p. 18.

ness than others. "But only the most efficient overhead groups and an occasional local church deal with problems of public relations in any but the usual manner. And the customary fashion is to handle difficulties as they arise, often ineptly and inconsistently."²³

Assets and Liabilities

There are at least four attributes and characteristics of religion which serve as assets to the practitioner of church public relations in his daily work:

1. Man is by nature inherently religious.
2. Great values of religion--brotherly love, service, justice, and stewardship, just to name a few--are accepted by most persons.
3. No one can deny the drama of religion.
4. Because of its uniqueness, the church can present a way of life--an enriched experience--that no other institution can offer.²⁴

Another asset enjoyed by institutions of credence, such as most churches, is "the fundamental faith of the public in all phases of its program," Harrall observed. "In the realm of public relations, this vital factor is as basic to gaining support as uranium to the development of atomic energy."²⁵

Ralph Stoody, formerly head of Methodist Information, noted that spires on buildings, bell towers, paintings, sculptures, tapestries, colorful windows, drama of liturgy, singing of hymns, and the distinctive garb of the clergy have helped down

²³Ralph Stoody, A Handbook of Church Public Relations (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 244.

²⁴Harrall, op. cit., p. 375.

²⁵Ibid., p. 377.

through the centuries to solidify in the thinking of the general public a positive identity for the church.²⁶

On the other hand, there are some liabilities. Among the primary hindrances the practitioner deals with include,

1. The intangible nature of religious activities;
2. The sacred nature of many activities, which demands a dignified approach;
3. The problem of showing the practical worth of some religious values;
4. The problem of interpreting a program that follows a more or less traditional pattern;
5. The difficulty of knowing at which level to project ideas so they appeal to persons of all ages.²⁷

It has been contended that public relations activity "in our society is . . . but a by-product of a problem with greater scope and seriousness: that of the creation and perpetuation of the mercantile mind. That mind has failed in some degree to grasp the essential aesthetic aspect of religion"28

Another liability is that controlled media, such as church publications, "reach but a minor fraction of total memberships. They are read by a still smaller proportion. This means that the only place that the many professed Christians are reading news of their own communions or of the larger world of religion is in their own newspapers."²⁹

²⁶Stoody, pp. 19-25.

²⁷Harrall, pp. 374-5.

²⁸L. W. Michaelson, "Religion and Madison Avenue," Catholic World, August, 1955, p. 376.

²⁹Stoody, p. 23.

It was noted as early as 1940 that there are other problems which have tended to render public relations activity deficient. Some of the following continue to be pertinent in 1969:

1. From the point of view of the publicity man, much preaching is irrelevant, oblivious to the changing intellectual climate of the age.
2. Our denominationalism makes publicity difficult. There is no one to serve the interests of the major denominations as wholes, or of Protestantism as a whole.
3. Successful public relations requires work which many Protestant leaders are unwilling to assume in addition to their other burdens.
4. Church leaders need to become aware that "the contemporary world has entered into an era of mass-thinking and mass-action."³⁰

History of Church Public Relations

Churches and various religious agencies and bodies have developed quality public relations and public information programs in recent years nearly similar to those found in industry, business enterprises, governmental departments and agencies and other non-profit organizations such as professional societies. Many churches and religious bodies have patterned their organized programs of public relations along the lines established since 1900 by United States business and industry.*

³⁰Miron A. Morrill, "Protestant Public Relations," Christian Century, March 13, 1940, pp. 356-7.

*The author distinguishes between church public relations and public relations for business and industry. Unlike their counterparts in business and industry, practitioners of church public relations generally do not handle financial public relations with respect to the dissemination of information to stockholders and the investment community. The two types of public relations are quite similar in most other aspects.

The church was among the first to utilize the tools and techniques of public relations: "Centuries before Madison Avenue, U. S. A., even thought of implanting desires for merchandise by singing their virtues over the airways, the church harmonized its appeals, its invitations." Stoody has affirmed that "progress of religion can be measured in public relations milestones. Through missionaries, travelers, hymns, parchment scrolls and letters, through sermons and personal conversations, religion has made its march around the globe."³¹

Some church leaders have mistakenly thought of public relations for churches as a relatively new concept. Many still do. But whether or not leaders have realized it or not, churches have conducted public relations for many centuries: "It is a rather new name for many activities and procedures, some of which are centuries old." Some means of disseminating information "have been augmented by many new channels of communications, including radio, television, newspapers, exhibits, magazines, motion pictures, advertising, direct mail, church publications, and scores of others."³²

Stoody suggested that when "Martin Luther hurled the inkpot at the devil . . . , he initiated the use of a new missile in the age-long war against evil." Ink, like moveable type invented by Gutenberg, "was to become as revolutionary, as powerful and of as long-range effectiveness in the centuries that followed, as the I. C. B. M. is today."

³¹Stoody, p. 20.

³²Harrall, p. 370.

It is no accident that the rapid spread of the Protestant Reformation followed so closely in point of time the invention of printing from moveable type, and that the Bible was the first book to be published.

Martin Luther's hammer, as he defiantly nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, was presently widely echoed by crude wooden presses. Their plates noisily implanted printer's ink on paper, proclaiming the new, revolutionary doctrines.³³

Though units of the Christian church practiced public relations for nearly two millennia, Lemuel Petersen and other observers have acknowledged that the church "has only been conscious of modern techniques since shortly before World War I. Then following the war-inspired impulse shared by business and government, the church took up publicity." A Lutheran group, since renamed the National Lutheran Council, initiated the first nationwide publicity program in the United States on behalf of a religious group in 1918. Winfred P. Elson, formerly head of public relations for the Lutheran group, was an early leader in church publicity.³⁴

In response to a renewed interest to church news following World War I, many major church bodies in the United States established organized publicity programs during the 1920's. On November 27, 1929, in Washington, D. C., an organization of church publicity and public relations personnel founded the National Religious Publicity Council.³⁵ As early as 1946 its membership included "church publicity and

³³W. Phillips Davison, "The Nature of Effective Communication," Public Relations Handbook, ed., Philip Lesly (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 22.

³⁴Petersen, Quill, p. 8.

³⁵Marvin C. Wilbur, History and Background: The Religious Public Relations Council, Inc. (New York: Religious Public Relations Council, Inc., 1969), p. 1.

promotion officials, religious editors of newspapers and magazines, radio and movie people whose concerns are in religion and other church officials 'whose duties require knowledge and interest in publicity and promotion'." Elson helped to found the publicity council.³⁶

The council's charter membership had representatives from four church-related agencies, the Federal Council of Churches, and seven denominations. Among the twenty-nine charter members, there were four Baptists, two Congregationalists, three Lutherans, six Methodists, seven Presbyterians (U. S. A.), one Presbyterian (U. S.), and one United Brethren worker. There was one member each from several organizations including the Federal Council of Churches, Girls' Friendly Society, Social and Religious Agencies, YMCA, and YWCA. Marvin C. Wilbur said that "the organization committee . . . consisted of Herbert G. Rugg, chairman (Congregationalist); M. E. McIntosh (Baptist); Winfred P. Elson (Lutheran); Walter I. Clark (Presbyterian); and Mabel M. Sheibley (Presbyterian)."³⁷

But it was not until 1940 that the larger Protestant denominations in the United States began to develop extensive public relations programs. The Federal Council of Churches in Christ appointed John Fortson its director of public relations that year. The Federal Council also organized a commission on public relations "to guide . . . its policy planning and to help it reach the public more effectively."³⁸

³⁶Petersen, p. 10.

³⁷Wilbur, History and Background, pp. 1, 3.

³⁸Petersen, pp. 8-9.

An indication of a more widespread awareness of the need for organized programs was evidenced by the appointments of more directors with competent journalistic and public relations training and experience. For example, the Home Missions Council of North America named George B. Ahn Jr., a University of Michigan graduate with a background "in business publicity and public relations, editing and church publicity." During the mid-1940's some smaller denominations and religious groups began to hire public relations managers. Early during that decade Methodist Information was initiated. It was and continues to be a well-organized program of publicity and promotional work. Groups such as the United Canvas Movement were operating in "the broader area of public relations." The movement was "church public relations at its best in that the effort is not to advance the welfare of any one church group but to seek better relations between the general public and all the local institutions of religion,"³⁹ Petersen said.

In an article written in 1946, Petersen described the Methodist Information program:

. . . every newspaper in the country has received, directly and indirectly, hundreds of stories and pictures from Methodist Information. Director Ralph Stody is providing the Methodist church with probably the best publicity that any Protestant denomination is getting today.

From offices in New York City, Chicago and Nashville he and his staff send out art and stories on every conceivable Methodist event and personality to every newspaper and magazine that might use the material. Most of the releases are imaginative, have news value and are given excellent play, as

³⁹Ibid.

shown by the magnificent displays on racks, in scrapbooks, and in the files at these offices of the returns from clipping services.⁴⁰

After the conclusion of World War II there was a considerable rise in interest in religion across the nation as there had been following the first World War. The increased interest was "accompanied by a commensurate rise in religious news coverage by papers of every size."⁴¹ Responding to the general public's interest, many major units of the church followed the biblical admonition to communicate the good news by all available means, including the newspapers, radio and television. An organized program of working with the media of mass communications, it was thought, could significantly increase "the potential congregation and church constituency." At that point it became very "important to know how to use them to best advantage."⁴²

Church public relations professionals in the United States took a major step on April 22, 1955, when they adopted a statement of "Professional Aims for Religious Public Relations."⁴³ Members of the National Religious Publicity Council agreed to adhere to the provisions of the adopted statement.

As a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, dedicated to the task of making His church and its mission more widely and more favorably known, I subscribe to the following principles:

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 8.

⁴¹Harrall, p. 370.

⁴²John T. Stewart, How To Get Your Church News in Print (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960), p. 10.

⁴³Wilbur, p. 2.

1. To keep in mind the basic purpose of the Church and direct all my professional activities toward achieving that purpose.

2. To promote mutual understanding between the Church and media representatives, striving for essential harmony between institutional policy and freedom of the press.

3. To interpret the principles, policies and program of my church organization and to aid in their formulation in such a way as to achieve clarity in the public mind.

4. To avoid misleading statements, unfair comparisons, inaccuracies, derogatory comments and extravagant claims.

5. To exercise good taste in the use of language and illustrations.

6. To advance the standing of my profession by maintaining standards compatible with Christian ethics.

7. To seek to recruit dedicated and talented persons to my profession and to assist wherever possible in training them.

8. To regard other church public relations persons as colleagues rather than competitors.

In April, 1963, members attending the annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois, of the National Religious Publicity Council, Inc., voted to change the organization's name to the Religious Public Relations Council, Inc. It was felt the new name would be more representative of the work performed by members of the body.⁴⁴

Wilbur, executive secretary of the council, described the purpose of the renamed organization:

. . . to establish, raise and maintain the standard of public relations throughout the Churches and church-related agencies to the end that the total life of the Church will be advanced; and to promote fellowship, counseling, and exchange of ideas among its members.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 4.

Membership consists of persons who devote a major portion of their services to any Christian communion, interdenominational body, or church-related agency in professional public relations activities. Their activities include primary duties in newswriting, editing, public information, audio-visuals, radio, television, promotion, public relations and administration.⁴⁵

The council's membership includes virtually every major Christian church unit, most major denominations and many smaller ones. Public relations personnel from inter-church and interdenominational organizations, and scores of periodicals and publishing operations, also have joined. The council has developed an awards program to stimulate outstanding work by church public relations professionals and newsmen covering religion:

The RPRC Award of Merit in journalism was founded in 1949 in Washington, D. C. The Award of Merit in broadcasting was first presented in 1959. As of 1968, 97 awards have been made, 19 of these in broadcasting. Two special citations have been given: Religious News Service in 1960 and the Advertising Council in 1967. A special Memorial Tribute to Henry R. Luce was presented to Time, Inc. in 1967.⁴⁶

Current Philosophies of Church Public Relations

In his thesis Booz brought "together the various philosophies of public relations as seen by administrative officers of religious bodies and the kinds of public relations work as determined by their public relations personnel." His conclusions revealed a wide divergence of opinion among church officers and public relations

⁴⁵Marvin C. Wilbur (ed.) The Religious Public Relations Council, 1969-1970 Supplement Directory (New York: Religious Public Relations Council, Inc., 1969), p. 2.

⁴⁶Wilbur, The Religious Public Relations Council, Inc., 1969-1970 Directory, p. 14.

personnel concerning philosophies, roles, and types of work being done:

1. First, a large group agrees that public relations embraces the entire relationship of Christianity to all people.
2. A second group, somewhat smaller, thinks of public relations in terms of special activities that interpret the institution to the publics in order to enhance its prestige and reputation.
3. A third regards public relations as a tool of persuasion and suggestion to accomplish certain specific objectives (publicity services, fund-raising, securing more church members, and other immediate aims).
4. A fourth group, and this is the smallest group of the four, sees public relations as a means of asserting intellectual leadership in serving the community.
5. There is an obvious lack of understanding of just what public relations is and what the field can do in meeting the difficulties that face churches.
6. Although there is unanimous agreement that public relations is regarded by authorities as vitally important for survival and growth of churches, the fact that the concept of public relations varies so much among individual administrative officers hampers its full utilization.
7. Neither public relations nor public relations men themselves are employed effectively.
8. Among many religious bodies church public relations is used as a tool of persuasion on a limited approach basis, rather than as an overall activity correlating all the aims of an institution with all its publics.
9. Public relations is being used on too narrow a basis, very often only to perpetuate the individual interests of a church, rather than to work for the broader purpose of advancing the interests of religious thought.
10. Administrators of churches should gather together in a conference to agree on a definition of public relations in its broadest sense and develop general areas of agreement.
11. Church organizations should define clear-cut goals for themselves, and put them in writing . . . adaptable to changing conditions. The public relations man and all the publics can use them as a guide for attitudes and actions.
12. All churches should understand research methods in appraising

public understanding of their goals . . . revise some of their attitudes and actions so as to reach the goals of Christianity . . . if Christianity is to merit the publics' interest and support.

13. All churches should do more in analyzing their goals, particularly public relations objectives. These objectives should be so graphically defined in the public relations directors' minds that all their activities will lead directly to these ends.

14. Church public relations has increased in strength, in scope and in effectiveness during the past half century; has not been clearly defined as to nature, use and administrative placement; and is vitally essential for the survival and growth of all churches.⁴⁷

Harrall observed that public relations "has reached out and affected every phase of church life--administration, education, attendance, and missionary activities." Though the meaning of public relations, its functions and responsibilities are not well understood as they might be, it is probably more accepted by church leaders and people than ever before. It is "no longer a remote and secret specialty."⁴⁸

Though church public relations is still in its infancy historically, Donald C. Bolles has somewhat optimistically pointed out that it "is being utilized by churches to make its voice so powerful that it may rise above the din of daily life and point the way for all to a Christian sanctuary."⁴⁹

Practitioners Face Task

Booz and Stoodly have agreed that "there must be reality" to make a successful

⁴⁷Booz, "Public Relations Programs . . .," pp. 88-90.

⁴⁸Harrall, p. 373.

⁴⁹Public Relations for Your Church (Madison: Wisconsin Council of Churches, 1955), p. 21.

public relations program.⁵⁰ Backing up the normal functions and responsibilities of public relations (writing, editing, placement of stories and ideas, promotion, speaking, production, programming, and research)⁵¹ "there must be a fellowship of Christians worshiping together, studying together, building better lives, a better community, and a better world."⁵²

Thomas J. Ross, a noted public relations counselor, lucidly outlined the task which faces and will continue to face church public relations practitioners. It "is the establishment of PR units not merely to push publicity or the gray-flannel sell (hard, soft or invisible), but to transmit a public image of Christ's Church as it really is" by all available means.⁵³

⁵⁰Stoody, p. 244.

⁵¹Booz, pp. 94-6.

⁵²Stoody, p. 244.

⁵³"Our Public Image," America, September 5, 1959, p. 662.

CHAPTER II

A DIFFICULT BEGINNING

It became evident to a few top leaders in the Assemblies of God as early as 1944 that there was a need to initiate an organized program of public relations. The Reverend Harry M. Myers, who in 1954 was to become the first head of public relations for the church, said that he heard some sentiment expressed in the mid- and late-1940's "that centralization of information . . . would be well." But not all Assemblies of God leaders agreed. The denomination's Executive Presbytery, at that time headed by General Superintendent Ernest F. Williams, did not push for the establishment of one. Myers, without placing blame, indicated that "many of our early leaders were primarily preachers of the Word" and perhaps were not sensitive to the potentiality of an organized public relations program. He said ". . . their thoughts just didn't run towards taking steps to improve our public image as a movement."¹

The Assemblies of God grew extensively between 1914 and 1940. It was a period in which many local churches were founded. Then in the period from 1941 to 1953, the Assemblies of God went through an era of analytical development, "characterized by the creation of a host of internal service agencies" in the opinion

¹Letter from Harry M. Myers, Pastor, Faith Tabernacle, Tulsa, Okla., to author, November 5, 1969.

of the Reverend William W. Menzies.² But public relations was not one of the centralized agencies created. The leadership of the denomination was aware that other denominations were beginning publicity and public relations programs. They were also of the opinion that the headquarters departments, district officers, ministers, and local churches would not welcome such a program at that time.

The author suspects that a partial explanation for the ten-year delay can be found by examining the apparent self-identity of the Assemblies of God. In the 1940's and the early 1950's the top leadership as well as the rank and file membership still considered the Assemblies to be a small, loosely-tied fellowship of local churches. It is not suggested that the church had become a full-fledged denomination by 1954 when an organized public relations program was set up. But the Assemblies obviously was moving toward increased centralization, especially at the district and national levels. Local churches were strongly autonomous then. This independent relationship to hierarchical authority has been and continues to be jealously guarded.

As Menzies pointed out, the Assemblies of God instituted several new service departments at the headquarters between 1941 and 1953. The new agencies, anxious to be better understood and funded, developed separate publicity and promotions staffs and programs. Looking back to that period, the Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman observed that "as an organization we found that frequently our news

²William W. Menzies, "The Assemblies of God: 1941-1967, The Consolidation of a Revival Movement" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Iowa), p. 2, abstract.

releases . . . were not properly coordinated." The same could be said of most of the departmental promotions and fund-raising programs. Zimmerman recalled that the news releases even became "competitive" in some cases.³ The rivalry was indicative of the "thick walls" which had developed between some departments which were zealously contending for the attention, understanding, goodwill, and financial support of the church's nationwide constituency. Larger departments such as Sunday school and foreign missions were able to set up extensive publicity programs during that period because they had more funds available than did some of the smaller departments. The smaller ones, with equally worthy programs, usually had small publicity staffs, or none at all.

The arrangement of having separate departmental publicity staffs caused some thorny press and public relations problems. First, the lack of a denomination-wide public relations agency enabled some executive and departmental personnel to be more widely publicized than they might otherwise have been. Their opinions mentioned in departmental releases to local as well as national news outlets were often interpreted by media representatives and the general public as the denomination's authorized position on some issues when in fact their statements were merely personal observations. Second, the news media in Springfield, the wire services, magazines, and religious news syndicates and services were frustrated periodically in giving coverage to the Assemblies of God. In some cases these media received several,

³Interview with Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

sometimes contradictory releases on the same, frequently unimportant subject or event, and in other instances were given little or no information on more significant items and issues. Third, when newsmen had a question or were interested in a story, they quite often did not know a reliable Assemblies of God public information source to phone or see. Such a source had not been designated.

The Reverend J. Robert Ashcroft, from 1954 to 1958 the national secretary of the Department of Education, one of the new, but smaller service agencies, thought that the years preceding the founding of the Public Relations Department in 1954 were more characterized by "an absence of information going out as much or more than a diversity" of releases being disseminated.⁴ Ashcroft, the tall, bespectacled, and extremely well-groomed president of Evangel College who speaks in a low-pitched tenor voice, eloquently elaborated upon his contention:

While it is true that different people were handling different news items, and they were not always the official voice, voices of individuals were interpreted by the general public to be the official voice. And while the embarrassment was not significant, it was an embarrassment to some that individuals were speaking out not as officials, but as individuals. But it was being read as the stand of the organization.

It was an absence of making good relationships with information. Let me emphasize the point that as I understand public relations, it's to take into consideration the varieties of publics which there are and uniformly give them the facts as the facts are applicable and pertinent. And it takes the professionally-oriented person to understand the ethics and etiquette as well as the wisdom of correctly understanding the public to which the message is being beamed as well as knowing that all of the publics should get the facts.⁵

⁴Interview with J. Robert Ashcroft, President, Evangel College, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

⁵Ibid.

Perhaps the most important reason the department was founded was because of an attempt to systematically coordinate the promotions and fund-raising programs emanating from the headquarters. In conducting these activities, the departments tended to function as separate units rather than as an organized, collective body. Prior to 1954 the departments, apparently not aware or overly concerned with the publicity, promotions, and fund-raising activities of other departments, sent numerous bulk mailings at will to local churches and ministers seeking funds or requesting specific action on behalf of a program. It was not uncommon for two or more of these mailings to arrive almost simultaneously, often to the recipient's frustration. Not only did the mailings arrive nearly at the same time, they came too frequently. At that time many constituents and ministers thought the departments were wasteful in sending such large amounts of direct mail.

When the Reverend Ralph M. Riggs became general superintendent in 1954, he sought to set up a coordinated program of publicity and promotions. Riggs, now in his seventies and professor emeritus at Bethany Bible College in Santa Cruz, California, had been elected the denomination's presiding executive officer at the Milwaukee General Council in late summer of 1953. A large, hefty, robust man, Riggs was given to making hasty, impulsive decisions, according to some individuals who worked with him. But he did not fear making unpopular choices when he felt they were in the best interests of the Assemblies of God. The uncoordinated promotions program was among the first difficult, unpopular decisions he would have to make in his six-year tenure as general superintendent.

He moved quickly as was his custom. Riggs "had a desire to combine all of

the promotional work in one office"⁶ which would coordinate promotions, fund-raising, and publicity as well. To implement his plan, he began by conferring with the Reverend Bert Webb, a popular assistant general superintendent whom many thought might eventually become general superintendent, to have Lin Springer, publicity supervisor or the Sunday School Department, "draw up a paper as to what she thought ought to be done."⁷ It was quite logical for Riggs to call upon Miss Springer to draft the proposed plan for the new office inasmuch as she was in charge of a relatively large staff. Working under her were "a full-time artist, one or two writers, a file clerk, a secretary or two."⁸

Miss Springer compiled the requested report and filed it with Riggs on May 7, 1954.⁹ Her recommendations included a staff of seven employees: a national secretary, personal secretary, copy writer, stenographer, file clerk, and a researcher-editor.¹⁰ It was apparent in Miss Springer's report that she thought of "herself as the person to be in charge" of the new office. "When Brother Riggs received this paper, he scratched through Lin's name and put in Harry Myers' name, and Lin as a possibility."¹¹ When Myers was appointed to head the new operation, Miss Springer

⁶Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 2, 1969.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

resigned, presumably because she was passed over for the job. She entered the military and was not heard from thereafter.

On May 21, 1954, two weeks after Riggs received Miss Springer's report,¹² the opening of a new office was approved by the Executive Presbytery which adopted the following statement of authorization (See Appendix II for the complete statement):

The resident Executive Presbyters shall constitute the Promotional Committee, having general supervision over all the promotional activities of all departments. The General Superintendent shall nominate a Promotional Secretary to the Promotional Committee, subject to the supervision of the General Superintendent in all his activities and functions.¹³

After gaining executive approval, Riggs asked Myers "to serve as secretary of a headquarters' department to be called the Public Relations Department." It began to function on June 7, 1954, when Myers assumed his new responsibilities.¹⁴

The authorization paper had indicated the new office was to be called the Public Relations, Promotion and Publicity Department. However, there was some confusion as to the actual name given the office. On the letterhead it was referred to as the Promotional Department.¹⁵ The confusion was to prove to be a major source

¹²Carl G. Conner, "STATE OF THE OFFICE, Public Relations" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, March 1, 1966), p. 1. [Mimeographed.]

¹³"Public Relations, Promotion and Publicity Department" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, undated), p. 1 [Mimeographed.].

¹⁴Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Council of the Assemblies of God, September 1-6, 1955, Oklahoma City, Okla. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1955), p. 75.

¹⁵Letter from Conner.

of friction in relationships with other departments particularly in the first few years of operation. The department's name was officially changed in late 1955 and early 1956. The Reverend Carl G. Conner, who joined the headquarters public relations staff in December, 1954, described the factors involved in the name change:

Basically it came about because while we were on a tour with Brother Riggs and some of the other executives who were going over to see Evangel College, we started talking about this whole general area. On the way over, I said to Brother Riggs, 'You know, we really ought to change the name from Promotional Department to a less objectionable name of Public Relations.' He warmed up to the idea. So we discussed it with Harry Myers and it was taken up with the Executive Presbyters' session and approved.¹⁶

It was anticipated that the departments would be fearful and, in many instances, openly resentful of a newly-established agency conducting activities which they felt rightfully belonged under their supervision. Riggs, in an attempt to soften the expected negative reception Myers and his new staff would be accorded, circulated a memorandum to all headquarters offices. "It was primarily to introduce Harry Myers to the headquarters, and at the same time, to give in very brief terms what his purpose was to be."¹⁷ In spite of Riggs' strategy, the staffs of other departments were apprehensive about the extent and nature of Myers' assignments and how they would be affected by them. "There was also a degree of intrepidation [among the departments] about the idea of a single department assuming major portions of promotions and public relations work."¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

Conner, who joined Myers' staff in December, 1954, as a public relations writer and assistant, summed up the unwritten policy which the staff sought to follow in an attempt to allay the deepest fears personnel in the other departments apparently had.

. . . to provide services to the headquarters and to the fellowship which other departments were not providing. In this regard, publicity was one of them. There were individual biographical publicity releases in the various departments but nothing of an overall measure. To supply assistance to departments in areas where they had no help. An example of this would be the writing of folders for Education with regard to Evangel College. We were always looking for areas, ways and means, of helping departments do things for which they had no facility or background.¹⁹

Shortly after the new department was opened, a second memo was sent to the top administrative and editorial-publicity personnel in other headquarters' departments. It was tactfully worded and lavishly praised the work and programs of all departments. It stressed the importance of public relations in general and announced the major areas of responsibility the Public Relations Department would handle and control. The one-page, single-spaced memo indicated that the department would be in charge of information dissemination to the news media; release of news from all departments to the editors of the forty-three district news bulletins; coordination of the flow of direct bulk mail emanating from the departments to Assemblies of God churches, contributors, members, and ministers; production of other printed materials such as pamphlets, booklets, brochures, banners, posters, etc., on behalf of the entire denomination²⁰ (See Appendix III). The awaited memo seemed to assure the

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰"From the PROMOTIONAL DEPARTMENT" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, undated), pp. 1-2 [Typewritten.].

department heads and the editorial-publicity staffs that the Public Relations Department would not, as they had feared, take over the actual writing and production of promotional materials, direct mail, and copy for the controlled media of the Assemblies of God such as The Pentecostal Evangel, the widely-circulated magazine. But still personnel in the departments continued to resent the fact that the Public Relations Department had been assigned to handle the release of information to the public media and flow of news items to the district bulletins.

Overall, there was a mixed reaction to the opening of the Public Relations Department among personnel in the other departments and offices. Fortunately for the success of the public relations program, most key staff members had adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward the new department. This was probably wise on their part because the Public Relations Department was a new venture, and many, including Riggs and Myers, were unsure about the specific directions it would eventually take.²¹

To be sure, there was open opposition to Myers and his staff during the initial months of operation. Gwen Jones, the charming, petite, and extremely able editor, recalled that when the department was established, a general resistance to change emerged at the headquarters, especially to shuffling of work assignments. Some editorial-publicity staff members in other departments believed that if their daily work activities were reassigned to the Public Relations Department, "there would be inaccuracies" inasmuch as the new department would not be closely familiar

²¹Interview with Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo.; by author, October 10, 1969.

with their programs and operations. Miss Jones mentioned one undesignated department which had traditionally handled its own publicity and promotional work. She said that department's personnel "felt that no one but someone in their department would understand the problems of communicating to their particular audiences."²²

Miss Jones' observation was affirmed by the Reverend Robert C. Cunningham, the white-haired, conservative editor of The Pentecostal Evangel. He said that there was a definite apprehension "that the Public Relations Office should not reflect fully the policies or viewpoint of the objectives of the department concerned."²³ He explained,

Our headquarters' work is divided into departments. These departments have a very pronounced program and have their own staff who are thoroughly familiar with their program and their policies and objectives. It is not easy for a public relations office to be thoroughly familiar with all of the details concerning all of these departments.²⁴

As we have noted, the Public Relations Department had to face extensive opposition and criticism during its first months of operation. Before the department's full-scale program could be organized and begin functioning well, it would take several years to attain the wide measure of acceptance so vitally needed in order for it to carry out its assigned activities.

Myers, the first head of the department, guided it through the crucial, initial

²²Interview with Gwen Jones, Editor, Advance magazine, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

²³Interview with Robert C. Cunningham, Editor, The Pentecostal Evangel, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

²⁴Ibid.

period. Though it was extremely difficult and frustrating at times for Myers and his staff, there were also those far-sighted individuals at the headquarters who honestly believed and openly expressed the view that the Public Relations Department "would be a very grand thing in helping to bring about greater equality" in the quality and quantity of publicity and other services performed for the national departments and offices as well as the entire denomination.²⁵ In the next chapter, the author shall look at the pioneering efforts which took place during Myers' administration.

²⁵Interview with McPherson.

CHAPTER III

MYERS GUIDES INITIAL DEVELOPMENT

When the denomination's Executive Presbytery authorized the establishment of the department in May, 1954, the Reverend Harry M. Myers was pastor of Evangel Temple, a large Assemblies of God church in Miami, Florida. Myers was invited to come to the denominational headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, for an interview with the Reverend Ralph M. Riggs, the recently-elected general superintendent, and the Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, an assistant general superintendent who in 1959 was to succeed Riggs as the church's presiding executive officer. After Myers arrived in Springfield for his appointment, he was asked by Riggs and Zimmerman at the request of the Executive Presbytery if he would be interested in assuming duties as the first head of a new central service agency to be called the Public Relations, Promotion and Publicity Department. The new department was then referred to by the shortened title of Promotional Department.¹

Myers had been serving in Miami for seventeen months. Zimmerman knew him well inasmuch as Myers had been the national secretary of the Home Missions Department prior to accepting the pastoral call to Miami. The two executive officers knew his abilities and background well because of other associations with him

¹Letter from Harry M. Myers, Pastor, Faith Tabernacle, Tulsa, Okla., to author, January 29, 1969.

in positions Myers had held in Springfield. Myers' first headquarters position was as assistant to the Reverend Fred Vogler, national secretary of the former Servicemen's Department. That operation was later made a division of the Christ's Ambassadors (youth) Department. He had accepted that assignment in 1944 after working a few years as an accountant and auditor for the federal government. He left his Servicemen's Department position in 1945 to become assistant pastor of Central Assembly of God in Springfield, the unofficial headquarters church of the denomination.

Myers accepted the difficult challenge. In accepting the post, he was aware of the intense apprehension and mistrust he would face. He knew this because of his previous administrative experience at the headquarters. He understood well how very thick the headquarters' departmental walls had become. Fortunately for him in his previous years of service at the headquarters and at Central Assembly of God where he was associated quite closely with national supervisory personnel of the denomination, he had earned a high degree of respect both administratively and personally from his colleagues and the executive officers.

Riggs and Zimmerman were aware that while Myers had little formal training in external public relations, particularly in relations with the mass media, he possessed a very friendly, outgoing, almost effervescent personality and an astute, seemingly unconscious bent for working successfully with Assemblies of God national, district and sectional leaders as well as rank-and-file ministers and members. He was also an able preacher which made him acceptable to the denomination's ministers. The Executive Presbytery apparently felt that Myers was the best candidate for the job because it called for the ability to surmount the difficult hurdles to be

faced in organizing and operating the new department.

Zimmerman described why he felt Myers was selected.

Well, of course, Brother Myers was most knowledgeable of the various headquarters' operations. His numerous contacts on the field together with his fine, analytical mind helped him to get hold of matters quickly. Then, too, I think that Harry Myers possessed a fine personality which caused him to be well received by various groups with whom he would be associated. He was uniquely qualified for the role which he filled.²

As far as the Executive Presbytery was concerned, Myers' two most important strengths were his knowledge of the headquarters and an almost uncanny ability to get along well with ministers. The presbytery apparently felt that it was very important for him to be able to work closely and effectively with the general superintendent and the other seven executive officers as well as with department heads. But it was also important for Myers to be acceptable to district officers and the church's ordained and licensed ministers who gave considerable support to the operation of the headquarters through payment of voluntarily-assessed annual fees.

In looking back to the time when he was appointed, Myers felt there were four primary reasons he was selected: (1) first-hand knowledge of the headquarters operation and ability to get along well with its personnel; (2) work with and acceptability to ministers; (3) background in business administration; and (4) pastoral experience.³

²Interview with Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

³Interview with Harry M. Myers, Pastor, Faith Tabernacle, Tulsa, Okla., by author, February 1, 1969.

Though Myers was obviously not skilled in the standard tools and techniques of public relations practice, he was certainly the right man for the job of organizing and establishing the new department. Myers' eventual successor, the Reverend Carl G. Conner, speculated that "even a person who had been specifically trained in public relations would have encountered considerable opposition because undoubtedly he would have been mistrusted even more than was Brother Myers."⁴ Myers was among the first to admit to a personal lack of training and experience in public relations. Despite that major handicap, he willingly undertook the job.

Begins Duties

Shortly after he accepted the position, Myers and his family moved to Springfield. He began duties on June 7, 1954. Myers recalls that there were several important areas of public relations with which he had to deal almost immediately. Two areas were at the top of the list.

The first and perhaps most important problem to be solved was that of establishing a coordinated bulk-mail program for promotional and fund-raising materials which were distributed to local churches and ministers.⁵ The second was his service as an "unofficial" administrative assistant to Riggs.

With the mail problem, Myers had to move slowly. It was recommended that

⁴Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 2, 1969.

⁵Interview with Myers.

direct mail to churches and ministers be coordinated through his department. Though Myers was not given veto power over the content of promotional materials as some departmental editorial-publicity personnel had feared, he was assigned the task of coordinating the flow of the mailings. But that was the only restriction placed upon the promotional activities of the other departments. There was some evidence of resentment to such control, but nothing of a long-lasting serious nature.

There was at that time a small group at the headquarters who contended that the Promotional Department should be given control over the content of direct mail so that these materials would project more of an organization-wide, united image and less of the fragmented, separate departmental images. Such sentiment was rebuffed in the interest of maintaining harmony between the Promotional Department and the other departments. It was apparent that a clash on the issue copy might seriously impair the effectiveness of the new department for many years to come. A victory on the matter of copy content might have dealt a death blow to any success the Promotional Department might cultivate in ensuing years.

Riggs liked Myers and his work and felt that he would be a capable administrative assistant. But since none of the other executive officers had assistants other than secretaries, Riggs reasoned that it would be unpopular to designate Myers as his official administrative assistant. But if Myers were to assist him in quiet, unobtrusive ways in his capacity as head of the Promotional Department, little would be said.

The work load on the general superintendent was extremely heavy. He had far more to do than he could possibly handle. Quite frequently Riggs asked Myers

to handle writing assignments, answering of correspondence, drafting of reports and plans, and miscellaneous other tasks. Before too many months had passed, department heads became aware of Myers' close working relationship with Riggs. A few of them began to evidence some signs of resentment toward Myers because of this. For example, when Riggs or the executive officers had made a decision, Riggs often would automatically ask Myers to communicate it to appropriate personnel.

In time Myers' working relationship with Riggs began to be a source of irritation to some of the other executive officers. They apparently were of the opinion that if the general superintendent did not communicate their decisions, some other means of channeling such matters ought be developed.

Myers began to see signs of hidden and overt resentment toward him in his day-to-day associations with both groups. Myers concluded that the only way to assure both groups that he was merely following Riggs' instructions would be if Riggs himself were to call for periodic meetings of both groups in order to announce decisions and other pertinent information. At Myers' suggestion, Riggs instituted monthly meetings of the "team," as the combined group came to be called. Myers felt this was "a real victory."⁶

In addition to the two major areas mentioned above, there were some other areas in which Myers felt it was necessary to initiate some action:

⁶Letter from Harry M. Myers, Pastor, Faith Tabernacle, Tulsa, Okla., to author, November 5, 1969.

1. Improve the headquarters' and denominational images among the various external publics.
2. Improve the headquarters' image among Assemblies of God churches and ministers.
3. Establish a coordinated flow of pertinent information to internal and external publics.
4. Devise a program of tactice to overcome the fear of centralization of promotional and public relations function at the headquarters.⁷

Myers did not pretend to suggest that there were any easy answers to achieving the four goals. He simply set about to develop and utilize steady, workable and acceptable programs and procedures aimed at accomplishing his aims by earning the genuine respect of the various publics through proven performance.

For example, a regular procedure of disseminating news to the mass media and internal publications of the Assemblies of God was set up. The procedure was established when Myers hired Carl G. Conner, then a young news editor for a daily newspaper in Dunn, North Carolina, as his assistant and public relations writer.

News dissemination "was one of the first things instituted as the department got underway. We experienced opposition for a while as we tried to obtain information from some departments, but persistence paid off."⁸ Concerning public information, Myers' theory was to "disseminate information that would be of interest and

⁷Interview with Myers.

⁸Letter from Myers.

and help to our own employees, customers, and those outside our denomination, and it would help eliminate misunderstanding."⁹

That first year, Myers wrote in his annual report that "news releases covering the activities of the General Council are being released to sixty (60) magazines, newspaper syndicates, religious news services and radio stations."¹⁰

"News from Springfield" was one of the department's early endeavors aimed at getting news of denominational interest to ministers, local churches and the members and adherents of the Assemblies of God. Sent out in the form of a news service, "News from Springfield" was prepared specifically for the news bulletins published by the district offices of the denomination. The news service was launched in January, 1955, and was well received. Items were prepared in short paragraph form. Once the headquarters' editorial-publicity personnel saw that district editors were using significant amounts of material, they began to "channel more information through this than previously."¹¹

During Myers' first full year on the job, considerable amounts of pamphlet and brochure materials began to come under consideration. Most of these had been and still were prepared and expedited by the general secretary's staff. Though Myers felt such activities rightly belonged in his department, he was patient in securing

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Minutes of the Twenty-sixth General Council of the Assemblies of God, September 1-6, 1955, Oklahoma City, Okla. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1955), p. 75.

¹¹Letter from Conner.

information needed for developing new pieces as they were needed. Slowly resistance toward the new department subsided and the needed information for producing such informational materials was made available.¹²

But one big assignment gave Myers and his staff just the early measure of acceptance needed in order for them to perform more effectively. He and his workers were asked to help coordinate and handle arrangements and planning for the denomination's next large biennial business convention in early September, 1955, at Oklahoma City. Until that time, the arrangements were managed by one or two executive officers assisted by working committees.

That assignment was crucial in the department's short- and long-range growth and development. It meant that by necessity its staff would have the periodic contact it wanted with the executive officers, departments heads and their publicity staffs, and magazine editors. The assignment thus offered a means of earning their respect. In addition, it focused substantial attention upon the department prior to and during the six-day biennial business convention itself before the entire Executive Presbytery, district officers, foreign and home missionaries, many administrators and faculty members from the nine Assemblies' colleges, and several thousand delegate ministers and church members. In short, the assignment afforded a great opportunity for exposure before virtually every major decision-maker in the denomination. Unless the assignment was handled poorly, it was an ideal chance for the department to display its genuine value to the headquarters and the denomination. Myers made the

¹²Ibid.

most of the occasion, handling the assignment well. As a result, the department has been assigned convention arrangements ever since.

There were other accomplishments. During the department's first year an Assemblies of God corporate symbol was designed and approved under Myers' guidance. That suggestion was "one of the first things we recommended to the General Presbytery. Brother Riggs said it should have been done a long time ago." Myers, who found the general superintendent "very receptive to ideas," explained that the denomination's symbol was designed to emphasize the Bible, the importance of the gospel, and the distinction of the Assemblies of God.¹³ These symbols have since been imprinted on official church publications, letterhead, business cards, church and highway signs, and in newspaper advertising.

Guided tours of the headquarters' offices and Gospel Publishing House were also set up. At that time the office building and the publishing operation were three blocks apart.

Myers said there were some additional areas of accomplishment during his tenure as department head:

1. The first Assemblies of God wall calendar listing major church events was published.

2. Letterhead for all headquarters' departments and the Gospel Publishing House was standardized. Previously the departments had letterhead of varying designs and quality which tended to emphasize departmental services and ministries

¹³Letter from Myers.

rather than the overall headquarters' operation.

3. An annual press dinner was begun for working newsmen and women and their managers in Springfield.

4. Highway signs located at major highway entrances to the city, welcoming visitors to tour the denomination's international headquarters, were erected.¹⁴

After Myers had been in the position about five or six months, the Reverend Wilfred Brown, the general treasurer, became very seriously ill. During the extended period of Brown's illness, Myers, who had been a government auditor during World War II, was called upon to help in supervising the Finance Department. As the months passed, Myers was asked to devote still more of his time to financial matters. This meant he had to turn much of the responsibility of his department over to Conner, his very capable, extremely energetic assistant. "Beginning in December, 1954, he [Myers] was involved far more with finance than he was with public relations."¹⁵

By late December of the following year, Myers began to seriously feel that he had accomplished what he could in the areas of public relations, promotion and finance. More importantly to him, he longed to leave the rigors and demands of administrative work at the national level to return to his first calling, the pastoral and preaching ministry. His work at the denominational headquarters had come to be more a desk job than he had anticipated when he accepted the job. The following

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Letter from Conner.

month, in January, 1956, he accepted a call to become the pastor of Fremont Tabernacle, a large Assemblies' church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.¹⁶

Myers: In Retrospect

Myers' former associates agreed that his main contribution to the Assemblies of God public relations program was laying the groundwork on which future services, ministries and programs could be built. Conner is of the opinion that "with the resistance that had been prevalent before, no one else could have come in and really done what he did in opening the office."¹⁷ The passage of time and events would eventually prove that the choice of Myers made by the Executive Presbytery was the right one. In appointing him, members of the presbytery felt that he was perhaps one of only a few persons in the denomination with the right attributes required for the task.

There were those of his associates who were quick to mention that he was placed in a position for which he was not formally trained or experienced. These individuals felt that this limited his overall effectiveness. To some degree this was probably true. But Myers was bright enough to hire a competent journalist and public relations man like Conner who could more than compensate for his weakness. Conner's strengths were press relations and an uncanny knowledge of the fundamentals of public relations practice. Certainly the fact that Myers was not formally trained

¹⁶Letter from Myers.

¹⁷Letter from Conner.

limited the amount of professional respect he was able to command from headquarters personnel.

But despite his time-consuming assignment in finance, limited knowledge of public relations, and the difficult opposition he encountered in the beginning, his associates and the author contend that he did exceptionally well in initiating an organized program of public relations activities for the Assemblies of God.

CHAPTER IV

CONNER GUIDES DEPARTMENT THROUGH FORMATIVE YEARS

When the Reverend Harry M. Myers resigned in January, 1956, and accepted the pastorate of Fremont Tabernacle in Minneapolis, Minnesota, his young assistant, Carl G. Conner, was named by the Executive Presbytery to succeed him. Conner, in his late twenties, had joined Myers' staff about thirteen months earlier after a relatively brief news-editorial career with daily newspapers in Ohio and North Carolina.

Conner was first asked to consider joining the Promotional Department in June, 1954, the same month in which the department was opened. The initial overture to him was made in Dunn, North Carolina, by Myers and the Reverend Victor Trimmer, then the national secretary of the Home Missions Department. At that time Conner was the news editor of the Dunn Daily Record. Myers asked Conner, a layman, if he would be interested in accepting a new job as his public relations writer and assistant. Conner delayed in making a decision on Myers' offer.

Between June and October Conner was contacted several times by personnel from different departments at the denominational headquarters. In these Conner was offered various other positions, but none of these appealed to him. The personnel at the headquarters were interested in securing his services because he had excellent credentials as a professional journalist and Assemblies of God layman.

Officers of the denomination's North Carolina District Council had particularly high regard for him. In fact, these officers regarded Conner so highly that they licensed him to preach and, in 1957, granted him ordination.

By late November of 1954 Conner had concluded that it was very unlikely that he would accept a position in Springfield. But unexpectedly still another proposition was made to him:

But almost immediately I received a telephone call from Harry Myers shortly before Thanksgiving Day asking if I would come to Springfield for an interview within a day or two. Well, it was not possible for me to be there when he wanted. But ultimately I did fly out and got in there on a Saturday. I'll never forget it. When I arrived in Memphis, the plane was grounded due to bad weather. I boarded a bus for Springfield, an all-night rickety, rough ride.¹

When he arrived, he phoned Myers. "I was told that an appointment had been set up with Brother Riggs, Brother Zimmerman, and myself," Conner said. Following that interview, Conner decided to accept the position.

Conner's wife, Sara, was expecting her first child, Charles, at that time. "We were real concerned about whether we should move. We had to clear with the doctors to see if they would let us go," he recalled. This clearance was obtained. Then the Connors "packed up and moved everything." They arrived in Springfield on December 12.²

¹Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 2, 1969.

²Ibid.

Description of First Days on the Job

He started work on December 15, a half day early because "the property had been given to us [Assemblies of God] by the government for Evangel College." Just at the time Conner joined the staff, Myers was "very, very busy with . . . financial records." Myers, who had a strong background in accounting, was helping manage the Finance Department temporarily due to the serious illness of the Reverend Wilfred Brown, the denomination's general treasurer. In addition to those extra duties, Myers was also involved with the time-consuming task of helping prepare a feasibility report for a proposed new Assemblies of God international headquarters building. It was eventually built in 1960-1961. These other assignments left Myers little time for orientating Conner.

During the first few weeks Conner was bored by the lack of activity. By executive order, he was not allowed to initiate news stories in other departments unless he was so instructed. This directive was issued because personnel in the other departments were still very suspicious about the new department. Conner described these first days: "We sat around many days with barely enough to keep busy a half day, waiting for departments to ask us to put out a news release. We did do a few releases."

In the effort to launch a centralized publicity program, "the real breakthrough was the fact that the Evangel College property had been given to us. We hit the front page with big headlines," he said. Conner felt that this initial publicity coup was "the most fortunate thing that could have happened to us because this showed

the departments that they could get publicity, and that I personally could get it for them." This launched "a steady path through our doors that did not exist before."

Besides coordinating press relations, Conner also served as a tour guide, "errand boy, House Reporter editor, and a number of these things all boiled up into one" during the first months. An early project he carried out was writing and producing Your Church Makes News, a small, how-to-do-it pamphlet for ministers on how to prepare news releases and get along with a newspaper editor. Another activity which Conner conceived and promoted was encouraging Assemblies of God high school and college students to write term papers about their denomination, its doctrines, and history.³

However, his main assignment was development of a news dissemination program. One of his first steps was to compile a distribution list for the news releases he wrote. The following were included on the list:

1. News media in Springfield, Missouri.
2. Major wire services and syndicates, Associated Press, United Press International, Religious News Service (R. N. S.), and Evangelical Press Association (E. P. A.).⁴
3. Major newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media.
4. Newspapers in cities where the fifty Assemblies of God district head-

³Ibid.

⁴Religious News Service mails mimeographed copies of its releases from its offices in New York City to subscribing media. Evangelical Press Association does the same from its offices in LaCanada, California.

quarters offices were located.

5. Miscellaneous publications and broadcast media requesting releases from the denomination.⁵

Conner also began another news service, "News from Springfield," which was sent out monthly starting in January, 1955. It was prepared for editors of the news bulletins published by each of the denomination's districts. These releases were mimeographed and contained two to four pages of ten to thirty short, one-paragraph items written in a suitable style. "News from Springfield" helped centralize the dispensing of information from the headquarters to district bulletins. Previously, each department sent its own news items to district editors. This news service was and continues to be well received by the district editors who use much of the material provided. Conner handled the gathering of the information, writing, editing, duplication, and distribution of "News from Springfield."

With the organization of the centralized news release program and "News from Springfield," the Public Relations Department started handling the distribution of all news releases from the headquarters to the mass media as well as to some of the denomination's periodicals. Some departments, accustomed to handling their own news programs, were slow to relinquish this responsibility to the Public Relations Department. However, the responsibility was eventually turned over to Myers and Conner.

⁵Carl G. Conner, "STATE OF THE OFFICE, Public Relations" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, March 1, 1966), p. 2 [Mimeographed.].

Conner Succeeds Myers

After Myers resigned as head of the department in early January, 1956, to accept a pastorate in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Executive Presbytery appointed Conner to succeed him. Conner was given the title public relations representative. Presumably the title was chosen because it was not known at that time whether Conner would function with full department head status. Myers had operated without a title. The executive officers and some of his associates regarded him as an "unofficial" administrative assistant to Riggs. Conner did not like the title public relations representative, but he did learn "to cope with it."⁶

Myers had been Riggs' hand-picked public relations man. When Myers resigned, Riggs evidently decided to divest himself of direct supervision of the department. Later in January, Zimmerman, who was then an assistant general superintendent, was appointed executive director of public relations.

Zimmerman commented on Conner's selection:

Of course, as the Public Relations Office became an active function, it became evident that talent was required with general formal training as far as relationships with the general news media were concerned. And Carl Conner was brought to the office to begin with because of his outstanding talent as far as the secular press is concerned. When Brother Myers resigned to take a pastorate, Carl was certainly a logical person to be considered to be named as head of the office.⁷

⁶Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 7, 1969.

⁷Interview with Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

The Reverend Warren F. McPherson, chosen Conner's successor in 1966, was the denomination's servicemen's representative in 1956 when Conner was appointed. McPherson recalled that "when Conner came in, the people immediately recognized Carl for his qualifications, background, training, and ability. They welcomed his technical know-how."⁸ On the other hand, Conner's personality and, perhaps to at least some degree, his administrative style often caused his working associates to either think very highly of him, or at the other extreme, be repelled. For most individuals, it was a case of liking him or not. Generally, there was no middle ground. Those who regarded him highly were often those who appreciated his strong professional competence and orientation in external public relations. Those not so appreciative of him seemed to think he overemphasized his work with groups outside the church at the expense of spending sufficient time strengthening internal relations.

In accepting his new position, Conner was aware that he would encounter opposition. There was no reason for him to expect that the resentment characteristic of Myers' administration would disappear immediately.

The Reverend Richard G. Champion, managing editor of The Pentecostal Evangel, speculated that any resentment toward him personally may have been partially caused by the general knowledge among headquarters personnel of Conner's impressive journalistic credentials, including graduate work in journalism and

⁸Interview with Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

newspaper editorial experience. Champion pointed out that many of the editorial personnel at the headquarters were trained on the job without benefit of formal classroom work and professional experience. In his opinion, some individuals with less formal education wanted to prove they were just as competent as Conner, perhaps even more competent. Champion also suspected that "a degree of this resentment existed because of the departmental structure within which we work. People have tended to be very conscious of their little areas."⁹

The feeling of resentment, and in isolated cases, the overt expression of direct opposition was sensed by Conner almost immediately after he was named to the position. He had foreseen that this might happen. Conner described how he attempted to overcome it:

Basically, it was a matter of making myself available, trying to avoid pushing myself into other departments and areas. I attempted to do a good job for them when I was asked to fulfill a particular task. Occasionally, I was able to drop suggestions at coffee breaks at the office regarding things that I could help them do, and by this means, I was able to open doors to get in. But I had to use the greatest of discretion in not pushing the door down to get into a department area, but to wait and demonstrate by the things I was doing that I could be valuable. Then I had to wait for the department to call us to assist in a particular activity.¹⁰

Conner also said that he felt it was necessary for him to wear two distinct hats on the job in order to merit acceptance professionally:

Internally, I had to let them know I had become a licensed minister. In dealing with newspapers, I had to emphasize my background in journalism. There is a degree of feeling that the ministers of the church are the ones who

⁹Interview with Richard G. Champion, Managing Editor, The Pentecostal Evangel, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

¹⁰Letter from Conner, October 7, 1969.

not only understand the ministry of the church but also the means and methods for communicating this ministry. As a result, had I been an ordained minister at the time that I came to the Public Relations Office, I would have been better accepted internally and less well accepted with the mass media. There was at this time the strongest feeling that a layman could not possibly be involved in this ministry.¹¹

Lists Departmental Goals

Carl Conner had a strong penchant for organization. So it is not surprising that he drafted a list of what he felt were primary, yet achievable short, medium, and long-range goals for himself and the department. The list he compiled in the weeks immediately after his appointment was aimed at trying to solve what he thought were the key internal and external public relations problems of the headquarters and the denomination as a whole.¹²

Conner was not in the position of being able to widely proclaim these goals due to the tense nature of the relationships with other departments. Also, an organized program of public relations was something new in the Assemblies of God and he thought it was necessary for him to tread softly in attempting to establish a strong, systematic operation for his department. There was a consensus among the leadership of the denomination then that a strong public relations program was needed. However, there was not general agreement as to how it would be organized and carried out. One thing was clear. Conner would have to operate on a meager budget as had Harry Myers.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Letter from Conner, October 2, 1969.

There were seven primary goals which Conner listed.

1. Gaining full control of news release dissemination and developing a quality publicity program.
2. Having charge of guided tours.
3. Making the coordination of periodical circulation a function of the department.
4. Developing a series of doctrinal advertisements for publication in secular newspapers and magazines.
5. Organizing a small speaker's bureau.
6. Placing of advertising on the Assemblies of God in major national mass circulation publications.
7. Scheduling of personal visits to mass media centers in New York and Washington, D. C., every two years.

Conner's first goal, gaining control of news dissemination, was achieved to a limited degree by the time he succeeded Myers. So he took advantage of every opportunity to do publicity work for the various headquarters departments and the executive officers. These opportunities did not necessarily come quickly. But Conner's aim was to mail out quality releases in a format acceptable to the news outlets receiving them.¹³

He also wanted to have charge of tours. At the time he took over, tours were being scheduled and conducted by the several departments where requests came.

¹³Letter from Conner, October 7, 1969.

Conner felt it was important that tours be coordinated through the Public Relations Department and be given by a trained tour guide who would present pertinent information and answer questions about the headquarters operation and the worldwide activities of the denomination.

The third goal, acquisition of the function of coordinating subscriber relations and promoting circulation sales for the Assemblies' periodicals, was a very sensitive issue with Conner. Subscriber relations were badly mishandled then. Often customer requests were disregarded. Conner contended that this poor treatment of customers was damaging to the public relations of the Assemblies of God. It was his contention that he could organize an effective subscriber relations and circulation promotion program within the Public Relations Department which might help develop goodwill.

Conner had been impressed in the decade previous to 1956 by the tremendous appeal of the newspaper and magazine advertisements developed and published by the Knights of Columbus, the Roman Catholic men's organization headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri. He reasoned that an adaptation of that type of advertising might provide an opportunity for the Assemblies of God to promote its beliefs and furnish answers to questions posed by the public-at-large concerning its unique doctrines, ministries, and practices.

The fifth goal, establishment of an Assemblies of God speakers' bureau, was important in his plans. He knew that a bureau could be an effective public relations technique for cultivating better understanding between the headquarters and the civic, professional, and patriotic groups in the city and surrounding towns and communities.

He had no visions of grandeur for any large-scale effectiveness of his proposed bureau. He did not think it would bring about the desired mutual understanding overnight, but he was convinced that able, well briefed speakers from the headquarters staff would help the overall public relations program.

His plan for placement of advertising in popular mass circulation magazines was perhaps the most unattainable of his initial goals for the department. Although he had hoped that the necessary funds for such a venture might be made available, he also was very keenly aware of the strong unlikelihood that such an ambitious institutional advertising program, regardless of how desirable it might be, would be more than a very remote possibility for many years to come.

Conner's final goal was more achievable. He hoped to develop closer acquaintances with key national newsmen and women such as George Cornell, religion writer for the Associated Press, Louis Cassels who holds the same post with United Press International, and Lillian Bloch who heads Religious News Service. During these trips to New York City and Washington, D. C., Conner hoped to be able to visit biennially the major broadcast networks and appropriate editorial personnel for the nation's leading mass circulation magazines, newspapers, and Sunday newspaper supplements. He realized that such media contacts were valuable and crucial to the overall effectiveness of the departmental program.

Advisory Committee

Shortly after Conner was appointed, the denomination's Executive Presbytery appointed a temporary public relations study committee. The committee was pre-

sumably named in order to help establish goals for the Public Relations Department and then provide suggested alternative methods for attaining those goals. As Conner understood its function, the committee was to have considered the purpose of the department, set down some basic operational guidelines, and attempt to define relationships with other departments. The membership included Zimmerman as chairman; the Reverend Bert Webb, assistant general superintendent; the Reverend J. Robert Ashcroft, national secretary, Department of Education; the Reverend E. M. Clark, national secretary, Radio Department; Conner; Trimmer; and the Reverend Grant A. Wacker, promotions director, Christ's Ambassadors (youth) Department.

Conner felt that it was very unfortunate that "this committee never functioned." He believed that if the committee had met and carried out its assignment, it would have been very helpful to the effectiveness of the Public Relations Department. "There was a little opposition to the committee and the fear on the part of some individuals that if it were to define these things, then we would be opening the door to our being able to do them."¹⁴

Though the public relations study committee never met, its primary assignments such as establishing guidelines for departmental operations and defining the department's relationships with other departments and executive officers were carried out over a period of several years. All this came about through an evolutionary process involving executive decisions which were made on questions resulting from the day-to-day activities of the department.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Conner had no further inkling as to why the committee never functioned other than his speculation that key personnel in other more established departments voiced quiet, yet strong opposition to the committee. Presumably Zimmerman felt that it was not a propitious time to push through a set of guidelines and policies which might intensify rather than relax the relationships between the Public Relations Departments and other departments. Also, Conner seemed to have felt entirely capable of developing operational guidelines, recommended policies, and program ideas on his own. So that committee was allowed to die an infant death.

Early Projects

During the first few months in his new position, Conner was naturally anxious to prove his professional competence. One of the first work areas he was asked to take over was the responsibility for answering mail inquiries dealing with Assemblies of God doctrines, practices, ministries, programs, and activities. This responsibility was being handled by the Reverend J. Roswell Flower who had been general secretary of the denomination since the mid-thirties.

"We started offering such pieces as 'Your Church Makes News' through our various periodicals. This started people writing to us."¹⁵ This in turn stimulated further expansion of Conner's program of encouraging youth of the denomination to write term papers about Assemblies of God history, doctrine, and activities. As the volume of such inquiries increased, "I sensed that the mail response was falling

¹⁵Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 17, 1969.

into a pattern. So I set up form letters that could handle the specific areas of request such as statistics,"¹⁶ Conner recalled. By categorizing all incoming mail, the department was able to develop pamphlet and brochure materials to provide answers to recurring questions and requests.

The form letters included standard introductory and closing paragraphs. These and standardized, one and two-paragraph answers to recurring questions were kept in a notebook. Each answer was codified for ease in locating when it was needed. The appropriate printed materials were also designated for each informational request or question. Thus, it was possible for the office secretary or a clerk-typist to select appropriate answers and printed materials for most incoming inquiries and requests. For letters requiring a personal reply, the procedure was to refer them to Conner. He dictated his reply onto a recording machine. Conner did not use a stenographer unless absolutely necessary because he felt such a procedure would tie up the time of two persons. He was of the opinion that a stenographer could work on something else while he was dictating. He felt that his method was a more efficient procedure.

Conner recounted how the responsibility for handling such correspondence was transferred from Flower, who retired in 1959, to the Public Relations Department:

There came a time when Brother Flower simply was not able to carry the volume of mail from persons writing for information on the Assemblies of God. And as we collected material, he gradually started bringing some of these letters down to me to answer. This evolved into a position where PR ultimately

¹⁶Ibid.

had this entire area of answering mail from persons interested in the organization.¹⁷

When Zimmerman was appointed chairman of the executive arrangements committee for the 1957 General Council business convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, he had several additional assignments pressing him. Looking for someone who might have time to assist him, he asked Conner if he and his staff could handle much of the detail work on convention arrangements. Conner gladly accepted for he saw the assignment as an opportunity to strengthen his department and prove his administrative and organizational ability. Conner recalled:

The 1955 council was in Oklahoma City. Harry Myers had done the coordination of that council and I worked with him under Brother Zimmerman. It was a gradual change to the point where I became coordinator over a period of a couple of councils. But our office did carry all of the burden of details at the first council in 1957 that he coordinated after I took over PR.¹⁸

Votes to Close Department

In April, 1957, the Assemblies of God headquarters' operation was in a financial crisis. Looking for a place to cut down on expenditures, the Executive Presbytery voted to close the Public Relations Department.

There may have been another reason for the decision to close the department. Some executive officers who were over some of the other established departments felt that the Public Relations Department had gradually infringed on areas of responsibility rightfully belonging to their own departments. Zimmerman suspected that this

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

could have been an ulterior reason for the decision to close the department. Thus, some executive officers saw the financial crisis as an opportunity "to bring about a readjustment and narrowing of the office's function down to more of the specific work of public relations."¹⁹

Overspending in several areas was the principal cause of the troubled financial situation:

The departments had been spending tremendous amounts of income from the Gospel Publishing House. We were under considerable pressure to build a new building. It was quite clear that unless we pulled ourselves in line financially that we would never be able to build a new building.²⁰

Ashcroft, as national secretary of the Department of Education, saw the decision from a different perspective. At that time, he pointed out, there was a general move toward vigorous austerity at the headquarters. "Public relations was mentioned as one of the luxuries, one of the things that the headquarters could get along without, without interfering with the functioning of the organization."²¹ Ashcroft commented,

It was not because there was any depreciation or lack of appreciation of the idea and importance of public relations or of Mr. Conner as a person, but rather here is one place where we can save money along with many others. But I don't believe we should look back upon this incident as a lack of appreciation of public relations or for the personnel in the office at that time.²²

¹⁹Interview with Zimmerman.

²⁰Letter from Conner.

²¹Interview with J. Robert Ashcroft, President, Evangel College, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

²²Ibid.

Conner, after receiving the unwelcomed news, was encouraged by his executive director to accept a teaching and administrative position at Evangel College in hope that the Public Relations Department would be reopened in a year or two. Following Zimmerman's recommendation, Conner accepted a newly-created position as director of men's dormitories and an instructor in journalism at Evangel in April. The appointment was to have become effective on September 1, 1957. During the spring and summer months, Conner continued to work full-time in his public relations position at the headquarters.

However, an unexpected decision was made in late August just prior to the scheduled closing of the department. The General Presbytery, in its annual meeting at the General Council business convention in Cleveland, over-ruled the decision of the Executive Presbytery and ordered the department reopened.

Since Conner had committed himself to serving in the Evangel College position through May 31, 1958, it was not possible for him to perform his full-time responsibilities with the department. So from September through May, "I continued to return to the office up to twenty hours a week to carry on as much work as possible. I returned to the headquarters' staff on a full-time basis on June 1," Conner said.²³

Thus, the department's doors were not actually shut inasmuch as the Executive Presbytery delayed the closing date until their decision could be ruled on at the next General Presbytery meeting. Conner said that two leading ministers of the denomination were instrumental in the vote to over-rule the Executive Presbytery

²³Letter from Conner, October 7, 1969.

decision:

James E. Hamill and G. Raymond Carlson were on the committee that discussed this. When they brought their report to the General Presbytery meeting preceding the start of the convention, a rather strong report was given to the effect that they should not close PR but should reopen it and in turn give the department more money to operate on. In effect, the department had not been closed but cut back since I worked there part-time in addition to duties at Evangel.²⁴

The action by the Executive Presbytery, while not dealing a death blow to the department, did severely slow the normal development of the department. On the other hand, the decision did provide a nine-month period during which there was time for some of the strained relations to be smoothed to some degree.

Conner Resumes Activities

When Conner reassumed his full-time duties with the department in June, 1958, one of his initial projects was to change the title of "News from Springfield" to "What's New Nationally." The change in titles occurred inadvertently. This monthly news digest, prepared for editors of the denomination's district news bulletins, was creating a minor public relations problem on the field. It was a problem because most Assemblies of God ministers and laymen have traditionally been avid proponents of a decentralized pattern of administering the national, district, sectional, and local activities of the church. Also, at that time the headquarters was acquiring a more centralized image which, of course, the executive officers did not want lest some ministers and churches be alienated.

²⁴Ibid.

Conner asked a free-lance artist for the Assemblies of God, Lloyd Colbaugh of Springfield, Missouri, to "design a new title script."²⁵ Conner assumed that Colbaugh would come back with the same title but different artwork. Colbaugh, who was aware of the necessity of projecting a decentralized image, suggested "What's New Nationally" as a new title. As might be expected, Conner adopted Colbaugh's recommendation.²⁶

A public relations activity initiated during Myers' administration, placing of highway billboard signs welcoming visitors to the city on behalf of the Assemblies of God, was developed further by Conner. The copy of these signs pointed out that Springfield is the international headquarters of the denomination and extended a welcome to the city. When the rental contracts ran out on the signs put up during Myers' tenure, Conner had new signs built and placed at "every major entrance to the city. This did something for our folk, encouraging our churches. These were also appreciated by the city fathers because we were pushing the city."²⁷

In a report he filed for the August, 1958, annual meeting of the General Presbytery in Springfield, Conner indicated that contact was being "maintained with several nationally-circulated magazines doing articles either on the Assemblies of God or the Pentecostal movement."²⁸ He pointed out that in many cases he was able

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 22, 1969.

²⁸Report to the General Presbytery, Departmental Reports and Financial Statement, June 21, 1957, to March 31, 1958 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1958), p. 123.

to furnish these periodicals with information which steered some magazines "away from bad publicity and toward good articles."²⁹

Conner worked with Richard Merriman of the religion section of Life magazine concerning an article they were planning on the subject of Pentecostals. Conner learned of the proposed article as a result of a phone conversation with the Reverend Hart Armstrong, a public relations officer at that time for the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Conner recalled that Armstrong "said that in all likelihood, they would tie the Assemblies of God into the article."³⁰ Conner then contacted Merriman about the article. On the basis of his conversation with Merriman, he felt it would be beneficial to go to New York to chat with him. Conner sought and received Zimmerman's approval for the trip.

In planning that flight to New York, Conner also scheduled conferences with appropriate editorial staff at Reader's Digest, Look, and World Church News. He also conferred with George Cornell of the Associated Press on the trip. The trip initiated what was to be a biennial tour by Conner and later by McPherson of the leading news outlets in New York, Washington, D. C., and Chicago.

During these visits, Conner sought to acquaint pertinent staff members of the national news media about the Assemblies of God because "some of them knew nothing at all about us." Conner also tried to place some articles. "I did get George Cornell to write an article on Speed-the-Light,"³¹ the denomination's youth fund-

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Letter from Conner, October 22, 1969.

³¹Ibid.

raising program providing foreign and home missionaries with vehicles and other equipment.

In subsequent years, Conner also stopped for conferences in Washington with such editors as Louis Cassels of United Press International and David Kucharsky, news editor of Christianity Today. Conner commented:

It is my personal opinion that the close contact with these individuals opened the door to their using a little more information than they had previously used. This is particularly true with Religious News Service in New York City. A trip at least once every one or two years seemed to be about right for these contacts.³²

Harrup's Proposed Legislation

Prior to the 1959 General Council business convention of the denomination in San Antonio, Texas, the Reverend Obie L. Harrup of Alexandria, Virginia, was planning to introduce proposed legislation to make the Public Relations Department a separate department rather than to have it continue to function as part of the General Service Department. The Harrup proposal would include the Public Relations Department in the General Council's Constitution and By-laws. In effect, that piece of legislation if passed would have made it impossible for the Executive Presbytery to vote to close the department as it had during the height of the financial crisis two years before. With Harrup's proposal, there would have to be a vote during a General Council business convention in order for the department to be closed.

However, Harrup became ill prior to the convention and was unable to attend

³²Ibid.

and bring up the matter for consideration. Conner, who had experienced the insecurity of the near closure of the department, thought that this would have been a valuable piece of legislation had it passed.³³

But the executive director of public relations, Zimmerman, differed with Conner on this point. Zimmerman contended,

I'm not too sure it would do anything to strengthen the office to have it so constitutionally organized. I think it enjoys a very high level of acceptance. It is considered by the headquarters offices as being a function of the General Superintendent. It seems to me that this position in the overall scheme of relationships puts PR in a very advantageous position.³⁴

McPherson also commented on what he felt was the questionable value of Harrup's proposal:

At this point I'm not too sure it would make that much difference or not. In the minds of some people, those departments which are listed in the General Council Constitution and By-laws are the authorized departments, and these things must go on no matter what. Some areas such as Public Relations are not mentioned. In the thinking of some people, if we had a change of administrations, then this might go out the window. I don't particularly follow that logic. Public Relations is a growing area. More and more people are aware of its importance and necessity. And actually to a degree by interpretation, we could say under some of the responsibilities to the General Superintendent that as part of his office, we are constitutionally in order to operate.³⁵

³³Ibid.

³⁴Interview with Zimmerman.

³⁵Interview with McPherson.

Relationships with Executive Director

Beginning in 1956 "after Brother Zimmerman became executive director of PR, it was very difficult for him and myself,"³⁶ Conner recalled. On many occasions, to Conner's frustration, he found that Zimmerman "could not speak affirmatively on certain areas without going back and clearing it with Brother Riggs. It was a very slow process at times" going through the channels "to get some answers to questions which needed more immediate attention."³⁷

At the 1959 General Council business convention in San Antonio, Texas, Zimmerman was elected to succeed Riggs as general superintendent. When it was known that Zimmerman would take over effective January 1, 1960, "there were those who felt that PR should have been passed on to other executives,"³⁸ Conner recalled. He speculated that there were at least three reasons the Public Relations Department was brought under Zimmerman:

First, as I remember, I talked with Brother Zimmerman about the portfolio at some length. And I specifically asked that he keep PR. My explanation to him was that he could give me immediate answers whereas going through an assistant general superintendent would mean that PR was one step removed from the top person. Since he had been an assistant general superintendent, he could appreciate this.

Also realizing that he was taking on additional responsibilities, he needed the assistance of an office that he could pitch things to occasionally. If he gave PR to another executive, it would have meant that the responsibility for this area

³⁶Letter from Conner, October 17, 1969.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

would be one step removed from him, and he would certainly not have the authority to go to the person in charge of PR and say, 'here, do this for me,' than he would if it were specifically under him.

Also, PR was of such a general nature that he felt like he could look at it in something like a neutral point of view more easily than could perhaps some of the other men.³⁹

In December, 1959, Zimmerman and the non-resident members of the Executive Presbytery met in order to select the departments to be placed under the executive officers for the next biennium. That body decided to keep the Public Relations Department under Zimmerman. He explained why the department was brought under the general superintendent:

PR represents a service function that relates itself to all of the various departments and divisions at general headquarters. And since the general superintendent has overall responsibility of administration and relates to all the various areas, it seems that it immediately brings Public Relations in a position of better acceptance under the direct executive direction of the Office of the General Superintendent. It does give the department the position of actually being a function out of the general superintendent's office. Thus, it does have a certain measure of acceptance and respect from the other departments which might not otherwise be enjoyed.⁴⁰

Circulation Assigned to Public Relations

Another important event in the history of the department took place in October, 1959. The circulation promotion and subscriber relations functions were combined and taken over by the Public Relations Department.⁴¹ Prior to this change,

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Interview with Zimmerman.

⁴¹Conner, "State of the Office . . .," p. 3.

these responsibilities were either not being carried out in some cases or were being poorly performed in others. The decision to have the department handle these functions was made by Samuel C. Ohler, administrative assistant to the general treasurer and head of the Finance Department, and Conner. Ohler explained the factors involved in the decision:

We moved a certain amount of the circulation activities into Carl Conner's area because we felt that he could very effectively carry this on, probably more effectively than any other place in the organization. It was our feeling that we needed good public relations with our church constituency in these matters. We felt we needed more effective public relations in this area than had previously existed. This is why it was our desire to assign this work to him because we felt it would be carried out very well.

When we were dealing with the need for public relations in circulation, we placed this in Carl Conner's area not because we wanted to or felt we needed to go to the executives for their reaction. We were faced with an assignment, with a problem, and we handled it in what we felt was the best way to get the job done. The reaction was favorable because we received playback from the constituency that their problems were handled satisfactorily and pleasingly.⁴²

At that time, it was generally acknowledged that there were no other places besides the Public Relations Department where circulation activities could be assigned. In October, 1959, the department was operating with a small staff of two or three. Conner wanted to enlarge it. He also felt that by becoming the circulation manager for the denomination's magazines, the added personnel which he would need and be given would strengthen and add prestige to the public relations program.

Gwen Jones, editor of Advance magazine, was relieved "when they made the

⁴²Interview with Samuel C. Ohler, Administrative Assistant to the General Treasurer, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

transfer because nothing was being done to promote increased circulation, and something was certainly better than nothing."⁴³ Her sentiment was shared by most of the headquarters' magazine editors. Each editor sorely needed assistance in circulation promotion and subscriber relations. Not one editor had enough time himself or herself, other staff members, or adequate funds available to conduct the work. It was too costly for any one publication to perform these functions by itself. But when the work was centralized under Conner with costs pro-rated to each magazine, it was felt that the work might be performed satisfactorily. Conner knew that he might not be able to do as much work for the magazines as they might want, but he did feel that his background in public relations as well as his administrative ability would enable him to set up and carry on an acceptable program.

The reaction of the editors of some of the smaller magazines was summed up by Champion, managing editor of The Pentecostal Evangel:

We figured that the dispatch with which Public Relations could handle this would help us considerably in relationships with our customers. But as far as circulation promotion was concerned, I found that the Circulation Office was doing very little for the C. A. Herald when I was its editor. Most of the circulation promotion that was done, I did myself. Yet if we had to handle all of these activities ourselves, it would probably be a load that would require us to add somebody to our staff. At that point we could not afford to set up a separate circulation department. So it may be that it was a necessary evil.⁴⁴

⁴³Interview with Gwen Jones, Editor, Advance magazine, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

⁴⁴Interview with Champion.

When Conner took over circulation, the total distribution of the Assemblies of God magazines was 245,807.⁴⁵ Conner was given permission to add staff needed to perform the circulation work. His early activities in circulation promotion involved designing follow-up pieces to be sent to customers with expiring subscriptions, compiling monthly reports of circulation in total and by magazine, and devising other projects to increase circulation sales. He also set up a system of handling changes of address and answer other inquiries from subscribers. For pieces of mail not fitting into a category in Conner's postcard and form letter system, a personal reply was dictated and sent.

Glenroy Shedd Hired

In the interval since Conner had returned to his full-time public relations duties in June, 1958, he continued to teach several evening journalism courses part-time during the fall and spring semesters at Evangel. And during that time, Conner had been interested in employing someone to assist with newswriting and handling guided tours. In September, 1960, it became financially feasible to hire a part-time student, A. Glenroy Shedd. He was the editor of the student newspaper at Evangel.

Shedd's initial assignment was giving tours. When he joined the public relations staff, the headquarters' offices were still at 434 West Pacific Street. Shedd described his initial duty:

The primary objective seemed to be to give statistics, show what the total operation involved, going from office to office and explaining some of

⁴⁵Conner, p. 4.

the areas, who was in charge, what type of work was involved in those particular areas. It was primarily to leave a favorable impression with the visitors, give them the information we felt they wanted to help them know how to handle their requests if they had particular interests in headquarters. We did not try to make a spiritual impact necessarily upon those who were not members of our denomination. We did try to be very cordial to anyone who came to the building.⁴⁶

In 1961 when the new, four-story administration building was completed, it became considerably easier to give guided tours since the Gospel Publishing House adjoined the new building. The old headquarters had been two or three blocks from the 434 West Pacific Street office building. Shedd continued to work part-time during the school year and summers full-time until he was graduated from Evangel in May, 1962.

After completing his undergraduate studies, Shedd agreed to join the department full-time as assistant to Conner. Shortly thereafter, a part-time tour guide was hired to provide Shedd with more time for publicity writing and other special projects.

Publicity Work Described

Conner and Shedd apparently had a good working relationship. Conner often shared confidential information with him. Conner continually "gave me what I thought might have been privileged information in his dealings with some of the others in headquarters."⁴⁷ It was Conner's contention that Shedd needed such behind-the-

⁴⁶Interview with A. Glenroy Shedd, Field Services-Promotions Coordinator, Sunday School Department, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 9, 1969.

⁴⁷Ibid.

scenes information for his writing and other public relations assignments.

Once a part-time tour guide was on the job, Shedd was able to devote the majority of his time to publicity writing. At first, the releases tended to be factual and relatively short. Only limited numbers of feature and interpretative-type releases were being written and disseminated. "It was mostly reporting events, statistics of our programs, developments within a particular department or situation. On occasion Conner wrote releases himself when there were special happenings such as decisions made by the General Presbytery that involved policy,"⁴⁸ Shedd recalled.

In November, 1964, Shedd remembered "doing special research when one of our missionaries, J. W. Tucker, was killed in the Congo." Conner sent Shedd "to go through letters and records on file in the Foreign Missions Department to get the background on his life. Carl wrote this story first. I rewrote Carl's original release many times because we used them in different ways for different publics,"⁴⁹ Shedd said.

Conner, assisted by Shedd, interviewed department heads and representatives on various news stories, "seeking to bring out some special emphasis of a day or year, a program emphasis, and as well to report changes in business policies, personnel appointments and this type of information." Shedd felt that "Carl had a good relationship with the general superintendent, and was able through that relationship and through other contacts that he maintained, to pick up news tips, sometimes

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

prior to the actual release of the information." When Conner and Shedd had knowledge that a story was about to break, "it was necessary at times to be careful of how we approached persons in questioning or seeking to develop the story further." Often Conner prepared the way for Shedd "to go to someone by making an appointment or pre-arrangement so that I would be able to go and take care of the details,"⁵⁰ Shedd pointed out.

After Shedd had written a story, it was edited by Conner. Stories were not necessarily checked over by the persons providing the information. Shedd thought that this procedure did cause some strain and dissatisfaction. He mentioned that it later proved best for good internal relations "to get a person's okay" before sending a release out.⁵¹

Besides newswriting, Shedd's assignments also included rewriting brochures and pamphlets, and expediting the printing of such public informational pieces. Occasionally, Conner asked him "to rewrite some sermons which Brother Zimmerman had preached into shorter form for magazine articles."⁵² Such inspiration-type articles were often published in The Pentecostal Evangel and various interdenominational periodicals. Shedd also assisted Conner in handling press relations and coordinating arrangements at the 1963 General Council business convention in Memphis, Tennessee.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

Another assignment was to edit PFNA News, a quarterly, four-page news publication of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. The Assemblies of God and the Church of God of Cleveland, Tennessee, were the largest denominations affiliated with P. F. N. A. Shedd collected and wrote news for the publication from the various member denominations. After copy was checked by Conner, Shedd expedited the production and distribution of the publication.

Conner also gave Shedd research assignments. A typical one was gathering information for the general superintendent on early revival movements for a series of lectures he was to present. Shedd indicated that "we did set up a speaker's bureau" on a limited basis. Information was sent out periodically, usually once every year or two, on various Assemblies of God personalities. The bureau was not developed "as much as we would have liked."⁵³

In 1963, the Public Relations Department became involved in providing information on the Assemblies of God to boys and young men taking part in activities of the Boy Scouts of America. In his 1963-1964 annual report, Conner indicated the department had developed a set of requirements for boys in the denomination's churches who were working toward the God and Country Award. Packets of appropriate published materials were compiled for distribution to boys requesting study materials.⁵⁴

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Report to the General Presbytery, Departmental Reports and Financial Statement, April 1, 1963, to March 31, 1964 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1964), pp. 153-4.

In 1964, Conner also reported to the General Presbytery that "there is growing interest and concern among pastors to be able to avail themselves of local news services in conjunction with their church programs." He pointed out that "a series of several articles on major phases of the Assemblies of God program is supplied with space for a local church tie-in. These have created ready-made opportunities for pastors to receive favorable coverage"⁵⁵ in local and area newspapers.

Info was another publication produced by the department. It was developed to assist the Finance Department in customer relations. Conner and Shedd worked closely with Ohler and Ray Roepke, head of customer service, to obtain ideas for content. Info was a small, four-page pamphlet produced quarterly. It was stuffed in envelopes containing billings once a quarter. The publication contained messages to ministers, church secretaries, and treasurers slanted to help them avert potential problems recurring often when ordering, getting materials, and making payments to Gospel Publishing House. It was discontinued when Advance magazine was begun in 1965. It was felt that Advance could publish the same information typically carried in Info at no cost to the Finance Department.

In January, 1965, Shedd resigned to become editor of C. A. Herald, the denomination's youth magazine. Another of Conner's former journalism students at Evangel College, Thomas A. Gerdis, was hired effective February 1 to succeed Shedd. Before joining Conner's staff as public relations assistant, Gerdis had been a general assignment reporter for the Herald, an evening daily newspaper in New

⁵⁵Ibid.

Britain, Connecticut.

Audio-Visual Service Transferred

The same month during which Shedd resigned a decision was reached by the Executive Presbytery to transfer the Foreign Missions Department's Audio-Visual Service to the Public Relations Department. The missions department had been "taking care of audio-visual services not only for themselves, but for all departments at headquarters." As the area was being operated, that department "was losing money and they did not feel it was their responsibility to carry on this function."⁵⁶

The Executive Presbytery made the decision to reassign the area upon the strong recommendation of the Reverend J. Philip Hogan, executive director of foreign missions. Before the verdict was reached, Zimmerman asked Conner if he thought he could handle the additional work load and still make the Audio-Visual Service into a self-supporting operation. Conner said that he felt he might be able to do that.

Conner was able to get the area in the black within a year by cutting back on what he thought was an excessive number of clerical workers and by developing a system of pro-rated charges for utilization of the area's services. Audio-Visual Service had been losing several thousand dollars annually.

Personnel in other headquarters' departments agreed that the transfer was an

⁵⁶Interview with Ohler.

expedient one as had been the case with circulation. The Reverend Charles W. Denton, who in 1965 was national secretary of the Sunday School Department, recalled that as with circulation back in 1959 "there were some questions as to whether audio-visual related to public relations. But it was just a situation where it had to be placed somewhere and this seemed to be the logical place to assign it at the time."⁵⁷ Denton's reaction was typical of the opinions held by most leading departmental personnel after the decision was announced.

Audio-Visual Service coordinated the scheduling of a library of seventy films which had been produced for the most part by the headquarters' departments. Most of these films belonged to the Foreign Missions Department. The Reverend Melvin E. Snyder, who managed the service, served as a consultant and technician to departments, ministers, and missionaries in the development of films, slide sets, filmstrips, and tape recordings.

In July, 1965, Conner made a trip to Fort Worth, Texas, at the request of Robert Lynn, managing editor of All-Church Press. A.C.P. produced local editions of church newspapers each week in larger cities including Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Kansas City, Memphis, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Wichita. The front page of each edition was sold to local churches of various denominations. These churches used the front page of their papers as replacements for the standard mimeographed church bulletins. The papers were sent to the mailing lists of each local

⁵⁷ Interview with Charles W. Denton, Coordinator, Spiritual Life-Evangelism Commission, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

church subscribing to the service. About twenty-five of the larger Assemblies of God churches in these cities subscribed to the A. C. P. service. Lynn asked Conner if his office would be willing to prepare a weekly column on news of the denomination to be made available as filler material to Assemblies' churches using the service. Conner agreed to do it. He assigned Gerdis to handle the preparation of the weekly column which usually contained seven or eight "News Briefs" on current events in the denomination. As soon as "News Briefs" became available, the column was immediately installed as a regular front page feature by about ten of the churches. More began using it in ensuing months.

A new Assemblies of God ministerial magazine, Advance, began publication in October, 1965. The new periodical began carrying a regular monthly column, "Public Relations," to assist ministers and local church leaders. This how-to-do-it column on most phases of church public relations, slanted to the local level, is still carried in the "Your Church" section of the publication.

Call to Winston-Salem

As early as the spring of 1965, Conner began to sense he had reached the point where he had already made most of the important contributions to his church's public relations program that he might be able to make as department head. Several months later, in December, he was asked to come to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to consider a call to become the pastor of First Assembly of God. He preached in Sunday services there in mid-January, 1966, and accepted the pastorate a few days later. His resignation was effective March 13.

Conner, who had been ordained a minister of the Assemblies of God by the North Carolina District nearly a decade earlier, described the background on his resignation:

The main reason I resigned was the simple fact that I felt it was God's will. I had felt a year before resigning that the Lord would have me go into a different type of ministry, and I had been praying about it. On the other hand, there is no doubt in my mind that the increasing pressure of feeling that I was not getting done what I wanted to see done did have a bearing on my praying and my seeking God.⁵⁸

Conner's Performance

There were several factors which Conner thought tended to hinder his production and performance as department head. "The biggest single hindrance . . . was responsibility without authority." On many occasions, he recalled, "I had specific responsibilities and yet I found it very difficult to get the job because I did not have the authority to say, 'this is the way it is going to be done'." It was bothersome for Conner to have to obtain executive approval on what he thought was inconsequential detail. He cited, as an example, the matter of providing guided tours. "In the early days of the tours, we were supposed to keep extraneous people out of the building and yet I did not have the authority to say to the people that they could not come in, especially people like insurance salesmen."⁵⁹ He mentioned other factors:

Of course, the budget was always a problem. We never really had in the budget what we should have had. And because Brother Zimmerman was

⁵⁸Letter from Conner.

⁵⁹Ibid.

executive director of the department, there were times when he hesitated to get things for fear that everyone else would want to make the plunge. And, as a result, we had the oldest furniture, oldest typewriters, and hand-me-downs from every other area.

In the case of staff, my personal feeling was that we usually had a pretty good staff in the PR Department. There were a few occasions when we felt desperately in need of better workers, particularly in the secretarial area. But, overall, we feel that this was not the most serious problem.⁶⁰

On the other hand, he said that "I would think that the one great advantage that Public Relations had was the fact that being under the general superintendent we carried the prestige and authority of his office." He sensed the headquarters personnel "knew that when we spoke, we had his backing. This made it somewhat easier. Also we were in a neutral area, and we could cross lines more readily than other departmental personnel."⁶¹

During Conner's ten years as department head, his fellow headquarters' associates thought of him as "aggressive," "energetic," "ambitious," "a person with extraordinary drive." Some considered Conner "too dominant," a person who had difficulty "seeing the other person's point of view." Others labeled him a "perfectionist." Still others noted that "he was careless about details" and "acted too quickly" in some instances.

Arlyn R. Pember, who served as a tour guide under Conner and later as assistant circulation manager under McPherson, summarized the Public Relations Department staff feeling about Conner's performance and administration:

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

Carl's overall administration was very good. He had a vast resource of knowledge on the organization, its past history, and where it was going. For the most part, he had good rapport with his fellow workers. He talked with them freely. His administration was very good, strong, and quite stable.⁶²

Ohler thought that Conner was a "very efficient" administrator. "He ran the office very effectively. He demanded performance and he had capabilities to lay out a program and lay out work whereby it could be done with the least amount of wasted motion."⁶³

Shedd characterized his administration as "ambitious, forward-thinking. And he was always looking for ways to get his programs across. He was wanting to make new contacts and do the best he felt he should and could do."⁶⁴

Ashcroft, who was named president of Evangel College in 1958, said Conner had made two conspicuous contributions: "the correct release of information to the media . . . then second, the awareness of news and the value of getting the correct news to the various publics. I think these were essential qualities."⁶⁵

Conner's successor, McPherson, said, "Carl did a tremendous job in laying a foundation. He was willing to take this area, set the course, some guidelines, and set a pace for it." McPherson contended that "it took a person with the qualifications

⁶²Interview with Arlyn R. Pember, Assistant Circulation Manager, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 9, 1969.

⁶³Interview with Ohler.

⁶⁴Interview with Shedd.

⁶⁵Interview with Ashcroft.

and the personality that Carl had in order to do that." Had it not been for Conner, the Public Relations Department "would still be struggling along, getting nowhere."⁶⁶

In summary, most of Conner's associates agreed that there was a lot of pressure placed upon him, he put public relations on the map in the Assemblies of God, and he performed well considering his circumstances including budgetary and policy limitations. They concurred that his training and experience helped him immeasurably in pioneering the department through the first few crucial and difficult year when he had to fight for the department's existence.

Conner's Contributions

In addition to pioneering and "getting some specific areas tooled out,"⁶⁷ Conner worked with and developed many areas of the denomination's public relations program. He listed what he feels are some of his principal accomplishments:

1. Developed a program for release of news.
2. Coordinated release of statistics on the Assemblies of God.
3. Started "News from Springfield" for district news bulletins. This news service was changed to "What's New Nationally."
4. Established guided tours.
5. Set up a centralized receptionist for headquarters' lobby entrance.
6. Coordinated General Council business conventions. He was the first non-

⁶⁶Interview with McPherson.

⁶⁷Letter from Conner.

executive officer to be assigned this responsibility.

7. Established form letter systems for answering inquiries for information on the Assemblies of God.

8. Developed a program for supplying research information, not only for persons writing papers, but also for research publications including encyclopedias.

9. Held workshops on church public relations at conventions.

10. Supervised film distribution and technical services of the Audio-Visual Service.

11. Helped solve some serious public relations problems related to subscriber relations in his capacity as circulation manager.

12. Served on letterhead, radio, and spiritual life committees.

13. Worked as an "unofficial" administrative assistant to the general superintendent.

14. Established lines of operation for the various functions and services performed and provided by the Public Relations Department.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER V

McPHERSON BUILDS ON CONNER'S FOUNDATION

It took approximately three months following the resignation of the Reverend Carl G. Conner for his successor to be chosen. The Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, as the department's executive director, had as his first choice a former headquarters' supervisor, the Reverend Warren F. McPherson, then pastor of a thriving church in Kansas.

Zimmerman contacted McPherson several times by telephone, but McPherson was content and indicated to the general superintendent that he was not interested in the position. But Zimmerman was persistent and invited McPherson to come to the headquarters for an interview. The general superintendent evidently was persuasive because, following that visit, McPherson felt that he should accept the offer.

At that time, McPherson was the pastor of First Assembly of God in Parsons, Kansas. Two years earlier, in 1964, he had accepted the pastorate in Parsons after serving in the headquarters' Christ's Ambassadors (youth) Department. While in Parsons, McPherson led the church in an ambitious remodeling program which was nearing completion in April, 1966, when he agreed to head the Public Relations Department. McPherson completed his supervision of the remodeling at the Parsons church by the end of May. He assumed duties in Springfield on June 2, 1966, just five days before the twelfth anniversary of the department's founding, June 7, 1954.

McPherson had joined the C. A. Department staff in 1954, coming from Southern New England where he had held pastorates and was president of the district's C. A. program. From 1954 to 1964, he was the servicemen's ministry representative of the denomination. In that capacity, McPherson, who was a World War II veteran, traveled throughout the United States and took a trip around the world, conducting his ministries among active duty military personnel.

McPherson completed two undergraduate degrees in Springfield. Before he had gone to Southern New England in the early 1950's to serve as an associate pastor in Stamford, Connecticut, he had been graduated from Central Bible Institute, which was renamed Central Bible College in 1965. McPherson also earned a bachelor of arts at Drury College in 1964. He studied toward that degree evenings and Saturdays while he was associated with the C. A. Department.

His training and experience in public relations were different from Conner's. Whereas Conner's strengths were primarily in external public relations, McPherson had gained considerable experience writing and editing for the internal or controlled media at the headquarters. For two years, he served in the dual capacity as servicemen's representative and promotions director of the C. A. Department. In addition, he had taken several courses in journalism at Drury. Unlike Conner, who had come to the Public Relations Department as a layman, McPherson had the benefit of extensive pastoral and preaching experience from the positions he had held in Southern New England and with the C. A. Department. The ministerial background was particularly important to him as department head. That background usually accorded him quick acceptance in relationships with other Assemblies of God ministers.

McPherson commented on his public relations work.

I think possibly that my emphasis has been to build on the rapport that Carl had built with the news media and begin to turn some of the emphasis toward our local churches and the need of awakening them out there on the local front of this very area, and in providing services throughout our department to the church community in broadening the base that Carl had built.¹

New Title Chosen for McPherson

In March before he left to assume the pastorate in Winston-Salem, Conner had recommended to the general superintendent that a more appropriate title be given to his successor. Conner said he "detested" his title, public relations representative. Rather than allow usage of that title in some news releases which referred to or quoted him, Conner had resorted to calling himself the "public relationist." Few ever understood fully what that title had meant. Conner did not feel that he could officially be called the director of public relations inasmuch as each headquarters' department had an executive director. The executive officers were of the opinion that to call a department head a director would be confusing to outsiders. In leaving, Conner suggested that the Executive Presbytery choose a more suitable title.² McPherson commented,

Through the years, the title for the person who has been head of the area had been kicked around from pillar to post. I think that in lots of cases it has been very hard to live with. The title that Carl Conner had, I think,

¹Interview with Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

²Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 17, 1969.

was very difficult to live with. He was called the public relations representative and various other titles. This was an almost nondescript title for the kind of work Carl was called on to do.³

"Without calling this a national secretary, the title was switched around and called secretary of public relations. The people were told that this department, this office, is on a departmental level," McPherson pointed out. He was not sure his title was the best one, but it has not proved bothersome. "As I am in a given situation, I introduce myself in whatever nomenclature I feel that the people I am talking to understand best," he said. In addition to his assigned title, he has also used director of public relations and head of the Public Relations Department when it seemed appropriate.⁴

Early Activities

After assuming duties on June 2, one of McPherson's first steps was to strengthen the circulation promotion and subscriber relations area of the department. McPherson was successful in obtaining executive approval to hire an assistant circulation manager. Arlyn R. Pember, a layman who had been graduated from Central Bible College in June, and served as a part-time tour guide since 1964, was selected to fill the position.

Early during McPherson's administration, a program was developed whereby all pertinent releases disseminated by the Public Relations Department were made

³Interview with McPherson.

⁴Ibid.

available to the Assemblies of God ministers for their informational needs and release to local news media. This practice came about because over the years about twenty-five Assemblies' ministers had been added to the master news release mailing list. Under the newly-developed program, many releases were adapted and produced in fill-in form so the minister of a church might insert the local news slant. This was the beginning of the Assemblies of God News Service initially made available to ministers at five dollars a year. About 200 ministers subscribed to the service. The price was later increased to ten dollars a year.

"Projecting Your Image" was another public relations aid developed by the department to assist pastors of churches in publicizing and promoting special events. Gerdis developed the idea for the piece. McPherson assigned the job of writing the copy for the piece to Professor Raymond T. Brock of Evangel College. "Projecting Your Image" was offered to ministers through Advance magazine. About 500 ministers who sent in requests for it received a copy.

"Facts and Figures on the Assemblies of God" was another publication developed early during McPherson's administration. It was published for the first time in June, 1967, and included the latest denomination-wide statistics and a brief historical sketch of the denomination and the headquarters' facilities.

Continues Media Visits

Biennial trips to the news media centers in the East were continued by McPherson. In the fall of 1966, he visited New York City and Washington, D. C.,

to introduce himself to appropriate news personnel working in or dealing with the field of religion. McPherson said that "these trips serve a very useful purpose in getting acquainted with the individuals at the wire services, Religious News Service, and others in key positions."⁵ As a result of these periodic visits, he sensed that "they feel they can turn to us and we will give the information that they need. Or we'll give them the honest answers they seek."⁶ McPherson believed that these trips have yielded valuable dividends to the department and to the news media visited. He observed,

I just got back from a very profitable trip to the East [in October, 1969]. I found that the news media people have a high respect for the materials we are sending to them. I was particularly impressed with their comments on the quality of the releases and the frequency. We seem to have hit a pleasing level in that they're not getting them too fast. I also found a very friendly rapport which is being built up as a matter of subsequent visits to some of these people. The more we get acquainted, the more we like each other.⁷

Convention Arrangement Duties

McPherson coordinated his first General Council business convention in August, 1967, at Long Beach, California. He noted that this "responsibility is possibly the largest single assignment of this particular office because of the tremendous number of details involved in coordinating a convention of this size."⁸

⁵Letter from Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., to author, November 6, 1969.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Interview with McPherson.

He also handled arrangements for the 1969 convention in Dallas, Texas, which had approximately 9,600 registered delegates and crowds of up to 13,000 in attendance.

A Public Relations Department representative went to the Long Beach convention seven to ten days early to begin work with the news media. McPherson explained that "we always try to make contact with news media people to let them know what is going to happen and to mention the significance of the meeting."⁹ News releases were periodically sent out several months ahead of time to the news media in the convention city as well as to the wire services, Religious News Service, and magazines like Christianity Today and Christian Life.

In addition to external publicity, considerable amounts of copy and photographs have been prepared for the denomination's periodicals. "We try to sit down ahead of time and try to determine the kind of information each magazine might carry,"¹⁰ McPherson said. A steady flow of information was also sent to the district news publications, and announcements were made at ministers' institutes, district councils, sectional meetings, and summer camps.

The more "confidential information about what business is coming up"¹¹ was sent through the "Minister's Quarterly Newsletter." Proposed constitutional changes and information concerning the agenda were also disseminated through this publication. In addition, one or two special mailings containing pertinent information about

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

the convention were sent to the ministers. The mailings have included items like housing and pre-registration forms and a letter from the general superintendent encouraging attendance at the convention. The Public Relations Department has not handled the production and preparation of the annual report distributed at these conventions. However, there has been some interest in having this responsibility transferred to the department.¹²

McPherson's Aim: Service

In his report to the 1967 General Council convention, McPherson explained the philosophy which guided the operation of the department during the previous biennium. "We are convinced that the secret to earning good recognition can be summed up in the word service. It includes giving our time, talent, and total energy to help everyone we possibly can." He stressed that earned recognition should "be a true reflection of the Triune God whom we serve."¹³

McPherson noted that "there are many odd and unusual opinions of the Assemblies of God and what it stands for." In his activities on behalf of the denomination and the headquarters, the message he has emphasized among key publics has been that "we are a responsible organization, that we have nothing to hide, and that

¹²Letter from Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., to author, June 4, 1970.

¹³Minutes of the Thirty-second General Council of the Assemblies of God, August, 24-29, 1967, Long Beach, Calif. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1967), p. 137.

we have a number of clear thinking individuals among us." He added that the denomination has been taking a "conservative view in the Christian community and we in PR are bearing our part of the responsibility in communicating that view."¹⁴

In his duties as secretary of public relations, he saw the primary function of the department as working "with the Assemblies of God general superintendent in helping to see that a proper image is set forth for what we are doing and what we hope to do in the future." McPherson and his staff have attempted "not only to keep up with what is going on but also attempt to project what is coming in the future so we can be prepared."¹⁵

McPherson noted that in furnishing public relations counsel to the general superintendent he has not necessarily told him "what he wants to hear. He wants an honest answer." But McPherson has learned that "if you disagree, you better be able to give a reason why you disagree."¹⁶ In addition to counsel, the secretary of public relations and his staff have been called upon to represent the general superintendent at meetings, conduct research, help prepare letters, and write speeches and magazine articles.

Publicizing newsworthy programs, accomplishments, and developments has been the main service the department has provided to other headquarters' departments in McPherson's estimation. The Public Relations Department staff designed

¹⁴Interview with McPherson.

¹⁵Letter from McPherson, November 6, 1969.

¹⁶Ibid.

a special communications campaign for the new Data Processing Center which encountered considerable problems in changing over from a Speed-O-Mat System of maintaining mailing lists to computer tape. "This probably has been our greatest contribution right now in connection with the various publications,"¹⁷ McPherson observed.

The department's staff provided counsel on the public relations implications of certain decisions which are made by other departments from time to time. "They are beginning to learn that as they prepare for an event, we can give them an unbiased opinion and some suggestions and possibly think more objectively than they might because they're so close to a situation,"¹⁸ McPherson explained. It has not been uncommon for ministers to visit McPherson's office or write letters to him concerning public relations matters, seeking advice.

If the additional finances and staff were available to him, McPherson would broaden the base of the department's operation to include "more services and helps to our churches as well as to the general news media." He felt that "we have been very slow in setting a pace for our churches"¹⁹ in terms of assisting them more fully in their public relations activities.

He noted that since local churches of the Assemblies of God are sovereign, the headquarters has had to be careful not to present a strong centralized image to

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Interview with McPherson.

¹⁹Ibid.

them. As a consequence, he pointed out that it has been difficult for the various departments at the headquarters to put very much pressure on local churches to adopt programs, procedures, and policies the headquarters personnel have felt to be very worthwhile. McPherson explained as follows:

Traditionally here at headquarters we have not set the example. More times than not, we have waited until somebody out on the field has done something. And then everybody asks why don't we all do it or why doesn't headquarters do it? My philosophy would be for us to do a little more in taking the lead.²⁰

Departmental Self-Study

The next major step in the development of the Public Relations Department occurred in November, 1967, when a department-wide self-study was initiated. McPherson felt that this was a well-timed project because a self-study of the denomination had been initiated by an Executive Presbytery-appointed Committee on Advance. The Public Relations Department study was revised twice. It included a detailed listing of activities being performed in administration, public relations, Audio-Visual Service, and circulation. Short- and long-range goals for accomplishing the purposes of the department were listed and ranked in order of priority. McPherson said the study "was conducted as a means of giving ourselves a guideline by which we might measure our progress and the development of what we are trying to do."²¹

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Letter from McPherson.

He said that this was "a very meaningful survey and study" which has needed periodic revision. "We see areas for improvement. We see some items which become obsolete."²²

Gerdis Resigns

Late the following spring, in May, 1968, Gerdis, who had joined the department some three and a half years earlier, resigned in order to begin a graduate study program in journalism at Kansas State University, Manhattan. He was succeeded by Mrs. Elva J. Hoover, a highly competent, free-lance writer who had been recently graduated from Evangel College. Her appointment was effective June 1, 1968.

Transfer of Circulation

As of early October, 1969, it was anticipated that Public Relations Department staff members working in the area of circulation might be transferred to another department. The projected move was to include Pember, the assistant circulation manager, and the circulation secretarial and clerical workers. It was expected that a new circulation manager would be named on a full-time basis. McPherson, who had served as circulation manager in addition to his duties as secretary of public relations, was to begin serving full-time in public relations. It was reasoned that this would give McPherson more time to concentrate on developing the public relations

²²Ibid.

and Audio-Visual Service functions of the department.

Explaining the move, Zimmerman said that the work of the circulation area of the department had changed in recent years and might fit more closely some similar kinds of work being performed in other headquarters' departments.²³ McPherson described what he thought might be the rationale for the possible move:

The work of the circulation office was changed so drastically over the last year and a half since the transition started of changing from the Addressograph System of maintaining subscription lists to the new IBM 360 Computer. Through the intervening months much detail has been absorbed by the circulation area so that the complete nature of it has changed. And so now this area is handling a great deal of the order input and the customer relations that is a duplication of what is going on in other offices. So it will be absorbed eventually by those areas. This would still mean, however, that our office would be available for consultation and probably because of the strong ties that are here, we would continue to have some say in how the customers and subscribers are handled, and in the kind of mail that goes to them and the way it is answered. In the long run it will probably give us more time to grow and develop our public relations ministry in other ways.²⁴

McPherson's Contributions, Performance

As of December 31, 1969, McPherson had been secretary of public relations for three years and seven months. During that period, he introduced a program which was oriented toward building a strong internal public relations emphasis. Most headquarters observers agreed that McPherson had worked hard and successfully at developing more rapport between the Public Relations Department and other

²³Interview with Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

²⁴Interview with McPherson.

departments. In fact, several indicated that the smoothing of interdepartmental relations was his principal contribution since taking over the department.

The Reverend J. Philip Hogan, executive director of foreign missions, said that "Warren has had the good sense to build on the foundation which Carl Conner built. Warren's work of providing service to churches and our ministers has been excellent."²⁵ A leading administrator at the headquarters, Samuel C. Ohler, head of the Finance Department, noted in particular that McPherson "is doing a very good and effective job with our General Council conventions."²⁶

McPherson felt that three factors have operated to help his performance as department head. First, he contended that he has had a quality staff which over the years "has been quite good." Second, he thought the Public Relations Department "has had the admiration and respect of the other people." Third, as a service operation, the department has enjoyed a "position of neutrality."²⁷ He commented,

We have nothing to gain or lose program-wise as an office, whereas some of the various departments, if they were to go out here on their own and try to shout from the rooftops what they are doing, the immediate reaction might be that it is just a bunch of hot air. As we evaluate everything that is going on from a relatively impartial viewpoint, we can call proper attention of the people to what is going on, and can evaluate this in proper perspective.²⁸

²⁵Interview with J. Philip Hogan, Executive Director of Foreign Missions, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

²⁶Interview with Samuel C. Ohler, Administrative Assistant to the General Treasurer, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

²⁷Interview with McPherson.

²⁸Ibid.

On the other hand, a limited budget and a relatively small staff have been the main hindrances to McPherson's performance, in his opinion.²⁹ The problem of finances was not new to the department since it was not operated under its own, separate budget from June, 1954, until June, 1958. But McPherson thought that he and his staff have been able to perform admirably "with the amount of finances we have been given."³⁰

Though McPherson has been able to smooth relations with other departments in large measure, still some other departments have chosen to retain their high walls. Occasionally, this had caused such departments "to clam up and not provide us with much needed information. The communication barrier in some instances has been a real difficulty."³¹ Either the information has not been provided or has been received for the Public Relations Department to utilize it fully. McPherson seemed encouraged that this problem "seems to be resolving itself somewhat"³²

McPherson's associates noted that he possessed a good organizational ability. In contrast with Conner who liked to do things himself, McPherson has tended to delegate more assignments and work to those on his staff. Gwen Jones, editor of Advance magazine, emphasized that "Warren does quality work. I think he is a

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

disciplined person and holds steady in times of stress and storm."³³ His fellow workers noted that although he has seemed to turn out a slightly smaller volume of work than his predecessor, that work was of exceptional quality. The Reverend Robert C. Cunningham, editor of The Pentecostal Evangel, contended that McPherson displayed a "very broad understanding of our general program, policies, and objectives!"³⁴

McPherson was not totally happy with his performance since succeeding Conner. That attitude, of course, was a natural one. Describing his public relations work to date, McPherson used the term "satisfied dissatisfaction." He elaborated,

I find a great deal of satisfaction in working in the Public Relations Office in trying to create a better rapport between us, our churches, ministers, and many other publics in coming to grips with rumors and false impressions that arise, and in trying to get people to see the proper things. Now the dissatisfaction would come in the areas of where I wish we had made further progress or that things had gone a little faster or in seeing some of the blunders that we inevitably make no matter how hard we try. Philosophically speaking, we all make mistakes and we all see room for improvement. And so it is with a great deal of satisfaction that we feel we're making headway. And it is with optimism that we push forward feeling that we will overcome even in the areas that have been failures in the past.³⁵

³³Interview with Gwen Jones, Editor, Advance magazine, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

³⁴Interview with Robert C. Cunningham, Editor, The Pentecostal Evangel, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

³⁵Letter from McPherson.

CHAPTER VI

IN PERSPECTIVE (1954-1969)

During its first fifteen years of operation, the Public Relations Department of the Assemblies of God had at least two distinct leadership styles. One emphasized internal public relations. That style earmarked the administrations of the Reverend Harry M. Myers (June, 1954, to January, 1956) and the Reverend Warren F. McPherson (June, 1966, through December, 1969). The second style, placing emphasis upon external public relations, characterized the tenure of the Reverend Carl G. Conner (January, 1956, to March, 1966).

In the case of Myers, the major portion of his program (i. e., coordinating promotions, bulk mailings) during his short administration as department head was internally oriented. This was not of his own choosing as was the case with McPherson.

Initially, Myers emphasized a program which sought to solve some poor coordination procedures for promotional mailings. Myers' next step was to purify the various mailing lists (ministerial, church, magazines, customers) and set up a program for handling changes of address more efficiently.

Once those initial assignments made to the department by the Executive Presbytery had been carried out, Myers devoted more time to organizing the department and conducting special assignments periodically as an "unofficial" administrative assistant to the Reverend Ralph M. Riggs, general superintendent and executive

director of the department. But perhaps the principal area where Myers had to stress internal relations was in the highly sensitive matter of overcoming the problem of resentment toward the department on the part of several departments beginning even before he assumed his duties. Of course, Myers and his staff were also involved in external activities such as organizing and beginning a news program and holding press dinners. But the general complexion of Myers' administration was, by necessity of organization, assignments, and demands placed upon him in finance and preparation of a feasibility report for a new headquarters building, focused largely upon internal public relations.

Then beginning in 1956, when Conner succeeded Myers, the program shifted gradually to an emphasis upon external relations. This change was quite natural because Conner's orientation before joining the department had been secular, educationally and professionally. His formal education was in journalism and public relations studies. His professional experience had been in editing and writing capacities with daily newspapers in Ohio and his home state, North Carolina. From his first days on the job, his primary assignments were in external relations. He was extensively involved in newswriting, editing, and performed other public information activities. Conner obviously felt more at ease in working in these areas. An evidence of this was his close tie with newsmen in Springfield and nationally. Also, he frequently represented the general superintendent at meetings in the City of Springfield. Perhaps the culmination of his external activities occurred when he ran for a seat on the City Council in a non-partisan election in 1965. He narrowly missed being elected.

Conner was involved in internal relations. This was certainly not his strong point. Had the Public Relations Department not been so opposed by staffs of other departments prior to June, 1954, and the tenure of Myers, perhaps Conner would have been able to do more internally. But despite the strained relationships which he inherited from Myers (which certainly were not largely the fault of Myers), there were a number of internal public relations activities Conner performed. Some were accomplishments.

The first was "News from Springfield," later retitled "What's New Nationally." This was the monthly news service, including information from all headquarters' departments, sent to the editors of the denomination's district news bulletins.

Second, Conner began handling arrangements on his own in 1957 for the General Council business conventions. This work with representatives of other departments as well as associations Conner had with them in other meetings and appointments somewhat softened the previous hard line internal opposition to the Public Relations Department.

Third, he put his professional future in public relations on the line in 1957 when he chose to stay in Springfield after the Executive Presbytery voted to close the department. As will be recalled, the General Presbytery meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, in August, 1957, over-ruled the action of the Executive Presbytery and prevented the closing of the department.

Fourth, he accepted the challenge of organizing a program of circulation promotion and subscriber relations beginning in October, 1959. His work in circulation promotion was adequate at best. However, he had a strong interest in sub-

scriber relations and developed a highly successful program which overcame some very serious public relations problems which had existed previously.

Fifth, he developed the program of guided tours for the 8,000 to 10,000 persons visiting the headquarters each year. The presentation by guides on these tours tended to be secular in the opinion of some observers. These individuals wanted more of a ministry-oriented approach in the presentations made by the guides.

The sixth and final key area of Conner's involvement in internal public relations was taking over administration of the Audio-Visual Service from the Foreign Missions Department. In one year, he was able to balance this operation's budget after it had been losing several thousand dollars annually.

In June, 1966, when McPherson took over from Conner, the departmental emphasis returned to an internal public relations slant. McPherson's principal contribution was to bring the Public Relations Department to a new high in its relationships with some headquarters' departments. McPherson admitted that there was still room for improvement. The second area where he placed considerable emphasis upon internal relations was in providing public relations aids and counsel to local churches, pastors, and evangelists. A third area, the department's self-study conducted in 1967 and revised periodically since that time, stressed internal relations indirectly. This emphasis was mirrored by the slightly diminished emphases McPherson gave to continuing external activities like publicity. He tended to cut back on the volume of external publicity projects and placed more emphasis on providing service to the headquarters and the denomination. Thus, the program from June, 1966, to December, 1969, was oriented heavily toward the internal.

Opinions of Others

Also important to any assessment of the first fifteen years of the Public Relations Department are the observations of those who worked closest with it during that period. The consensus, based on the author's research of the subject, is that while the performance, work, and overall relations of the department have not been outstanding, there has been a steady improvement.

The Reverend Richard G. Champion summarized concisely the opinions of several. In the author's opinion, Champion correctly observed that the department had been "easy to criticize because we know what they're doing. Public relations is one area that's very much in the public eye of the departments."¹ Champion thought that the executive officers and department heads have realized for the most part that the department "has been a real asset to us."²

The department has "found a high degree of acceptability"³ in the opinion of the Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, its executive director. Others agreed that the department matured considerably and became well established. Myers commented,

I am very pleased with what the department is doing. I feel there will always be some restriction on it within the organization, but it is very definitely meeting a need to our outside publics. Now that it has a status as a department,

¹Interview with Richard G. Champion, Managing Editor, The Pentecostal Evangel, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 8, 1969.

²Interview with Champion.

³Interview with Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., by author, October 10, 1969.

it should enjoy equal status with all the others unless it might be the Foreign Missions Department.⁴

In Conner's opinion, "there has accrued to PR specific areas and functions that perhaps could never again be scattered throughout the organization."⁵ There was a centralization of public relations services which "has given the office a degree of stability,"⁶ he explained. Zimmerman agreed with Conner's statement. Zimmerman stressed that the department had become a ministry "that will not be dispensed with."⁷

Another evidence of the department's steady growth was its budget increase in the past decade. The department did not have a budget of its own from the fiscal year 1954-1955 through and including 1957-1958. For those years, its expenditures were absorbed into the headquarters' general budget. The public relations budget for 1958-1959 was \$12,787.79.⁸ That year there were only two full-time workers in the department, Conner and his secretary. By 1968-1969, the budget had multiplied nearly four times to \$48,694.⁹ By that time, the staff had increased several

⁴Letter from Harry M. Myers, Pastor, Faith Tabernacle, Tulsa, Okla., to author, November 5, 1969.

⁵Letter from Carl G. Conner, Pastor, First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, N. C., to author, October 17, 1969.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Interview with Zimmerman.

⁸"Public Relations Budget Report, Income and Expense, April 1, 1958, to March 31, 1959, Budget Estimate for Fiscal Year, 1959-1960" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, 1959).

⁹"Public Relations Department Budget Report of Income and Expense, Year Ended March 31, 1969, Approved Budget for Fiscal Year, 1969-1970" (Springfield, Mo.: Public Relations Department, Assemblies of God, 1969).

fold to include McPherson, his assistants for audio-visual, circulation, and public relations, a secretary, receptionist, a part-time tour guide, and three typists and three clerical workers.

McPherson Looks Ahead

McPherson pointed out that the activities and operational procedures for the department had been subjected to continual re-evaluation in recent years. He mentioned that "it has been only in the past five years that we [as a denomination and a department] have been willing to submit ourselves to a greater degree of intensive self-study."¹⁰

One obvious indicator of the new attitude toward self-study was the Public Relations Department self-study conducted voluntarily for the first time in 1967. The study was undertaken about the time the denomination's Committee on Advance was beginning an intensive self-study of the entire church's reason-for-being and the headquarters' operation.

With the projected move of the circulation promotion and subscriber relations function from the department, McPherson may well have more time to concentrate on public relations activities. Even with this added time, he will still need more staff for the department to perform much more effectively than it did through December, 1969. Though Zimmerman did not anticipate any large increase in the

¹⁰Letter from Warren F. McPherson, Secretary of Public Relations, Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., to author, November 6, 1969.

department's staff,¹¹ there will certainly be some expansion, hopefully in the areas suggested by the author in the next chapter. Without a doubt, tight budgetary restriction upon the department will be continued.

The Public Relations Department, having achieved a recognized degree of maturity and respect among the publics it serves, now has the opportunity to increase the quality and volume of its work. Perhaps many more of the sophisticated tools and techniques of public relations practice such as the utilization of proven research methods will hopefully be employed. As this is done, it can insure a more effective, balanced public relations effort.

As in the past, the department will continue to encounter some fairly rigid operational restrictions, due to the traditionally conservative administrative bent of the Executive Presbytery and the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. Briefly, the department's future is but as bright as the leadership of the denomination will allow it to be.

¹¹Interview with Zimmerman.

CHAPTER VII

AUTHOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The author suggests that it would be valuable for the short and long-range development of the department if it were to be studied in depth by an impartial body at least every five to ten years. Although it is certainly appropriate to place strong emphasis upon either the internal or external from time to time, it is likely that a more balanced emphasis between the two extremes ought to be sought after in the best public relations interests of the headquarters and the Assemblies of God churches, ministers, and lay members and adherents. The author believes the membership of the impartial study body should include outside professional public relations counsel as well as representatives from the General Presbytery, Executive Presbytery, the department, headquarters' staff, and lay constituents of the denomination. The author speculates that such an appointive body would recommend a more balanced program for the future than the one which was provided between June, 1954, and December 31, 1969.

Systematic research, a very important part of the public relations process, was almost totally left out of the department's regular program. It is understandable why little or no effort was made to conduct research which might yield valuable insight into the specific problem areas where the department might concentrate its efforts. The tradition among the headquarters' administrative staff, both at the

executive officer and departmental supervisory levels, was to rely almost 100 per cent upon personal contacts made during travels across the country at meetings, conventions, and guest speaking engagements. To some extent, this type of informal research was helpful in learning the attitudes and opinions of constituents concerning the operational affairs, programs, and ministries of the church nationally. However, the weakness of this unreliable method of research was that it often tended, though not necessarily, to take into account only the most vocal individuals' attitudes and opinions. Comparatively little effort was made to listen to what the general public felt or knew about the Assemblies of God. Since research could be very important to the orderly growth and development of the Assemblies of God segment of the worldwide body of Christ, it is recommended that this area be given considerable attention.

Two problems hindering the overall development and effectiveness of the Public Relations Department were a limited budget and understaffing. To overcome the problem of providing a balanced departmental program and adequate funds and staffing, the author suggests that at least two additional staff assistants be hired within the next five years. Added help is sorely needed by the secretary of public relations, in the opinion of the author, to allow him more time to guide the activities of the department. The additional staff members might enable him to delegate many assignments he performed himself because of a lack of help. By adding two assistants, he would have three professionals on his public relations staff. One of these might specialize in writing and editing copy and materials for internal publics such as magazines, programs, ministries, events, and emphases. A second professional

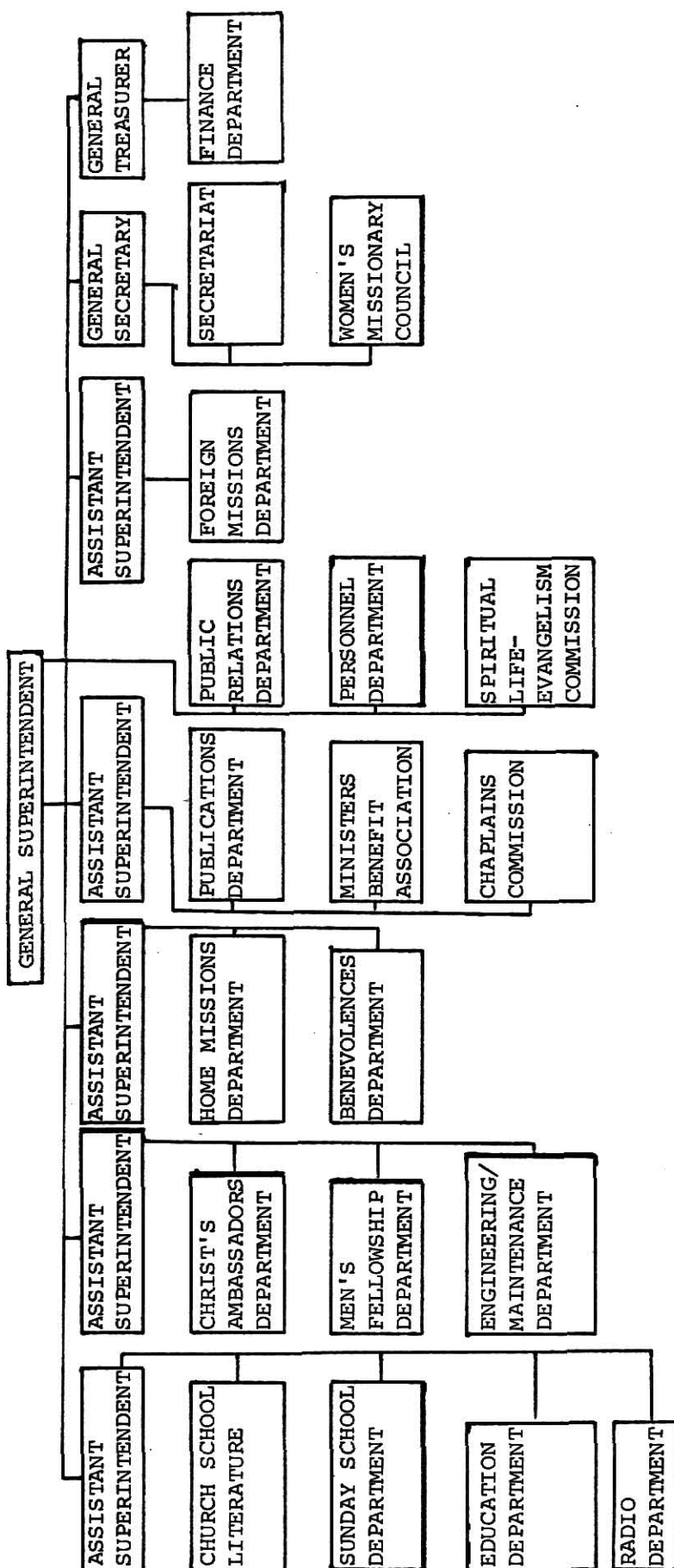
might work in external relations handling news writing, placement of stories and feature magazine articles with national, state, and local media, and supervising the speakers' bureau and guided tours. The third individual might be in charge of special assignments, projects, and research activities. He could handle such things as speech writing, annual and biennial reports, house organ, brochures, pamphlets, booklets, preparation of other informational materials, and various assignments which come up.

The above recommendations for staff work assignments are merely one set of alternatives to provide needed help for the department. It might be best for the work loads to be assigned differently from that recommended by the author. It would seem, while at least some work has been done in many areas, more expert and concentrated effort needs to be made in internal and external relations and special projects to enable the department to perform at a higher, more desirable level of service and effectiveness. Certainly the salaries of the three assistant positions should be scaled at a reasonably high level, perhaps rated at the equivalent of an assistant or associate department head. Not only are higher salaries needed to attract highly skilled professional personnel, but the status these positions are given might help to insure the acceptance these individuals are accorded in their work internally and externally. Such acceptance or the lack of it is often tantamount to being allowed to perform effectively or merely at a mediocre level.

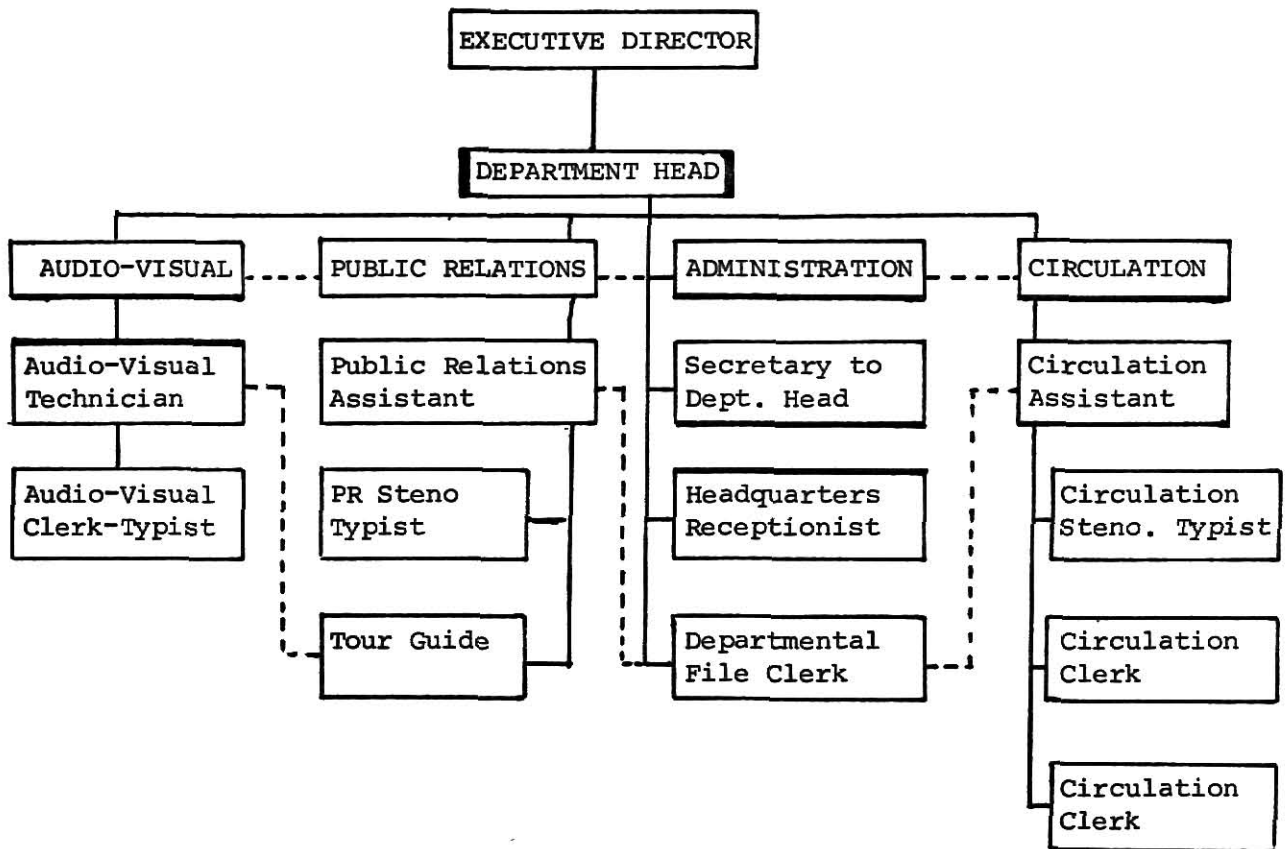
APPENDIX

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS' ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTERY



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT



PUBLIC RELATIONS, PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY DEPARTMENT

Section 1 - Authorization:

The resident Executive Presbyters shall constitute the Promotional Committee, having general supervision over all the promotional activities of all the departments.

The General Superintendent shall nominate a Promotional Secretary for appointment by the Executive Presbytery. This secretary shall be amenable to the Promotional Committee, subject to the supervision of the General Superintendent in all his activities and functions.

Section 2 - Scope:

Public relations, in its broadest sense, is a matter which will be influenced by all the executives and all the departments. It shall be the special prerogative of the Promotional Department and its secretary to be alert to any damage which is being done to good relations to our various publics and to seek ways in which our public relations may be improved.

The promotion phase of this department doubtless is the biggest and most important. In reality this involves the over-all advancement of the Assemblies of God, as far as the headquarters can advance those interests, and the success of all the departments. Of course, each department is seeking to advance its own particular interests, and this department shall not disrupt or impede, or seek to displace the promotional work of any department. It rather should study the promotional activities of each department and the promotional needs and opportunities of each with the view of counseling such departments and assisting them as it is needed and desired.

The study of the promotional activities and needs of each department will doubtless disclose the need of coordinating such activities in the interests of economy, harmony and effectiveness. A report of such need with suggestions for its remedying shall be submitted by the Secretary to the Promotional Committee for consideration and approval. The secretary shall then take the approved plan and assist the various departments in carrying out its provision.

The publicity part of the work of this department shall consist in serving as press relations for our church and all of its departments. It shall also be the duty of the secretary of this department to advertise and publicize our church and its departments in periodicals, papers, and otherwise as may be deemed advisable and profitable.

Section 3 - Functions:

In the matter of public relations it shall be the duty of his department to get across to the people our basic group desires, combat unfavorable publicity and overcome undesirable rumors by replacing rumor with fact. As far as possible it shall develop the good will of all our publics. Internal good relations shall be fostered and maintained by frank dissemination of plans and policies to our employees and sincere solicitation of suggestions from them. To the Personnel Department shall be committed the particular responsibility for internal good relations.

Uniform policies governing expenditures and costs shall prevail in all departments. Advertising and publicity space in the Evangel [The Pentecostal Evangel] shall be equitably assigned. There shall be a balance of promotional workers which go out from each department, and attempts shall be made to harmonize their itineraries. Care should be taken not to glut our public with promotional material which seems to them to be wasteful. It shall also be the duty of this department to stimulate the circulation of all our periodicals and papers.

This department shall operate under a budget assigned it by the Executive Presbytery.

From the PROMOTIONAL DEPARTMENT:

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of public relations, whether it be the commercial field or religion. This embraces not only the relationship of employee to employer, but also the relationship which an organization bears with all "publics."

This coming year it is the intention of the Public Relations Department to increase the news coverage of activities of the entire General Council through the media of newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. The grand job which is being done by all departments which make up our team deserves to be communicated both to our constituency and to the outside publics. As God blesses our fellowship [of churches], we can testify His goodness to all the world.

There is a certain amount of contact which must be maintained between the General Council offices and the 43 district offices. Information about activities of the districts is of interest to those at headquarters as well as throughout our fellowship. National information is naturally desired by all districts. The acquiring and disseminating of news between districts and headquarters' offices will be assisted by the Public Relations Department.

It is absolutely necessary to keep news, promotional materials, suggestions and helps flowing to pastors and key personnel of all our churches. We do not want to glut our churches with excessive mailings so we will be doing our best to reduce such mailings. Every effort will be made to assist in keeping the master church and ministerial mailing lists up-to-date and correct as possible.

With our fellowship growing constantly, with added thousands of believers as well as many new pioneer works being established and independent churches joining our ranks, we have an unending task of helping them to get acquainted with our entire church. They must become aware of the truth that it requires the utmost teamwork between local churches, the districts and the headquarters. To help inform new friends, periodically promotional pamphlets, posters and banners will be prepared and distributed, particularly beamed for use in the many district camp and council meetings and conventions throughout the nation.

One of the most important assignments given to the Public Relations Department is the maintaining of the General Policy Book which it recently compiled. Within this next year, it is our goal to compile a Handbook of Procedure which will go far towards standardizing the work throughout the headquarters' offices. Decisions by the executive officers affecting such policies and procedures must be immediately communicated to all concerned.

Lastly, it is the intention of the Public Relations Department to assist all departments at headquarters to exert that influence which will build good will and high morale in our whole fellowship. This will coordinate our forces and greatly aid us all in our forward march for God.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
AT THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

by

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B. A., Evangel College, 1963

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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The need for an organized public relations program at the Assemblies of God International Headquarters, Springfield, Missouri, became evident as early as 1944. By the early 1950's, some executive officers and departments recognized that a pressing need for a qualified public relations staff had developed.

In May, 1954, General Superintendent Ralph M. Riggs called for a suggested plan of organization for a new department. Miss Lin Springer drafted the plan. Later in May the plan was approved by the denomination's Executive Presbytery.

The Reverend Harry M. Myers, who had served as national secretary of various departments, was named to head the new department. He began duties on June 7, 1954, serving primarily as an administrative assistant to Riggs. Myers had some difficulty in pioneering the new department. This situation was partially caused by the notion some departmental personnel had that the Public Relations Department would take over their promotional activities. In December, 1954, Carl G. Conner, a layman who was in newspaper work in North Carolina, was hired to handle news-writing. Under Myers who resigned in January, 1956, to accept a pastorate, a news program was initiated, the department began coordinating the denomination's biennial business conventions, a corporate symbol was adopted, and guided tours were begun.

Conner, who had since become a licensed minister, was named department head. His title was public relations representative. The Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, an assistant general superintendent, was named the department's executive director. In 1957, during a headquarters financial crisis, the Executive Presbytery voted to close the department. However, the General Presbytery overruled that decision and ordered the department not to close. A circulation promotion

and subscriber relations office was set up in the department in October, 1959. Besides his public relations duties, Conner began serving as circulation manager for Assemblies of God magazines. Zimmerman became general superintendent in 1960 and continued to serve as executive director. A. Glenroy Shedd was named an assistant to Conner in 1963. In January, 1965, the Audio-Visual Service was transferred into the department from the Foreign Missions Department. That same month Shedd accepted the editorship of C. A. Herald, a youth periodical. Thomas A. Gerdis was hired as his successor. Conner resigned in March, 1966, to accept a pastorate. He had helped develop a news release program, coordinated several biennial business conventions, initiated the release of statistics, and worked as an "unofficial" administrative assistant to the general superintendent.

In June, 1966, the Reverend Warren F. McPherson, former servicemen's representative of the denomination, succeeded Conner. He was given a new title, secretary of public relations. Later in June, Arlyn R. Pember became the assistant circulation manager. In 1967, a self-study of the department was conducted. Gerdis resigned in May, 1968, and Mrs. Elva J. Hoover, a free-lance writer, was hired to succeed him. During his administration, McPherson gave special emphasis to internal public relations, developing several aids for ministers and churches. He coordinated two biennial business conventions.

Headquarters personnel agreed in October, 1969, that the department achieved a degree of maturity. The department will continue to become an even more valuable service area to the headquarters and the denomination as more of the tools of public relations practice such as research methods are utilized. The future of the department is only as bright as the leaders of the Assemblies of God want it to be.