

SIGNIS – Global Media Education

A Proposal

“In a world in which images are fast becoming of greater significance than policies, in which slogans often count for more than rational argument, and in which we will all make some of our most important democratic decisions on the basis of media evidence, media education is both essential to the exercising of our democratic rights and a necessary safeguard against the worst excesses of media manipulation for political purposes” – Len Masterman.

Preamble¹

Media has become the 3rd parent. In the past five decades alone media has gone through tremendous changes affecting a profound mutation of the society we live in. Values that have been held sacred for centuries in religious traditions are now challenged and even erased in an MTV show. Public opinion of my Muslim neighbour is moulded by CNN. Our children’s lifestyle and choices are being dictated by 30-second commercials. After the World Cup, God is Brazilian!

Media has moved from an entertainer and diffuser of information to a facilitator of personal and community understanding and expressions through new technologies; and therefore it has become the moulder and formator of an entire generations’ values and identity.

- *How was media seen then and now?*
- *What was the role of media then and now?*
- *Who owns, controls and uses the media?*
- *What are the effects and consequences?*

Looking back

In the Church we can trace our movement from Television Awareness Training or TAT in the late 70s, to Media Awareness (MA) training, and finally to media education training in the mid 80s. Media Education (ME) training was understood as an activity to help readers, listeners and viewers to be critical, appreciative and discriminating users of the mass media.

¹ Augustine Loorthusamy, OCIC Asia, August 1999

However, an evaluation of media education, especially in Asia, shows mixed results. In countries where human and material resources are made available there has been marked success. India, Korea and the Philippines have had real movement; but still this is not widespread. It is mainly the individual Bishop, priest, religious or lay person who is actively involved.

The reasons for the lack of success² in media education can be traced among others to the following:

1. Lack of trained personnel
2. Overloading of teachers involved in media education
3. Inadequate material resources and financial support for those involved
4. Weak methodological approaches i.e. teaching media education in logical/linear approach rather than a participative/discovery mode; or emphasizing technology
5. Hardly any horizontal research on the subject in many regions
6. Poor networking among practitioners; and with other Church offices
7. Lack of a holistic and inter-connected approach to tackling media education
8. Inability to keep pace with changing technologies
9. A low priority given to ME in Church institutions, including seminaries
10. Ignorance of the media and its impact on society

Briefly, we can summarize these into 3 areas: lack of **personnel, resources and effective planning**.

New developments

In today's Globalizing world, children suffer more stress than us – the single parent, parents working, teen parents, unemployed parents and those in poverty. They are often also affected by abuse of those in authority, divorced parents, substance abuse, alienation and peer pressure. The problems of society are washing over our schools and neighbourhoods and our children and youth are distracted. Mass media and new information technologies are very often the way out. A whole new vocabulary is growing around the Internet. Together with the avalanche of information and services on the net, young people are faced with a heavy dose of pornography, paedophilia and on-line gambling.

Media oligopolies threaten to hijack the media for their own interests. Just five transnational companies control 40% of all personal computers, oil and media. Media and big business work together for the growth of the market.

The communication revolution that predicted a better and brighter future for humankind has not occurred. What is seen instead is a threat to community life, the fragmentation of societies, a breakdown in cultures and the resulting isolation and alienation of people from one another.

² Augustine Loorthusamy, OCIC Asia, August 1999

The shift

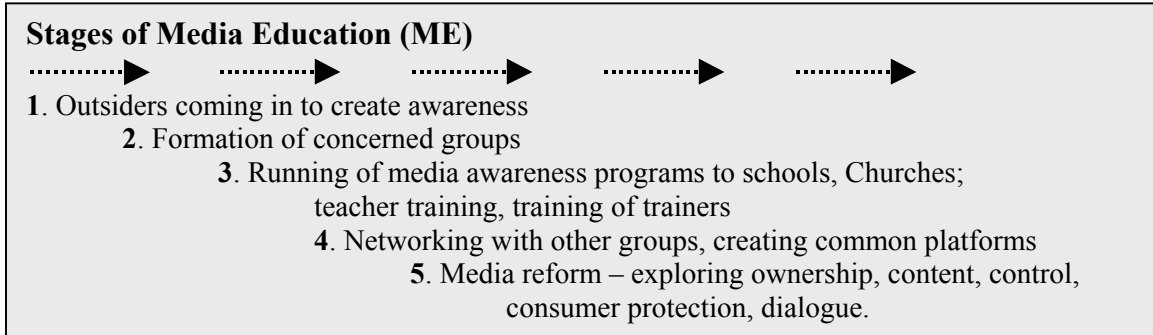
In responding to this globalized and far-influencing media, media education has to become globalized and holistic. This means moving towards:

- a. A comprehensive **understanding of personal and public communications** inclusive of new technologies.
 1. Media education and communication has to serve the **pastoral needs**³ and orientations of the Church or diocese in an integrated manner, and not stand alone.
 2. Communication is more than mass media or technology. It is **LIFE**. “The first and most important challenge is not to concentrate on the mass media but on life”⁴. Therefore, we need to understand the journey of the human person and communities, their joys and pains.
- b. A **critical understanding of global and local media** realities inclusive of structures, processes and value orientation.
 1. Who are the persons who control the media and what are their interests? Why were 30-40 year old cases of sexual abuse in the American Church brought out at the height of the Israel-Palestine conflict? How are minorities, women or religions portrayed?
 2. How can alternative media be used for the development of our people especially the poor in urban and rural areas? What is the link between media & development?
- c. The **formation of an active, discriminating public**, linked to a citizen’s movement for democratic media reforms and the establishment of alternative media at various levels.
 1. Media education is related to the formation of the entire person and of societies capable of reflecting upon themselves to grow and improve. We cannot talk of media education in isolation. It has to become integrated into the school curriculum, seminaries, novitiates, and colleges.

³ c.f. Church in Asia (No.48)

⁴ Fr Dr Michael Traber, Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century, FABC 1997 – Pg 115

2. And as communicators are we engaged in on-going formation of ourselves? How do we relate and communicate in the family, with colleagues, with God?



- d. **Networking and sharing of resources** at the sub-regional, regional and global levels within and without churches, with different religious bodies, civic organizations and even governments. A global reality needs a global response.

1. Media education, fund raising, lobbying all become an opportunity for the Church to build bridges with the world, to be relevant, to promote Kingdom values, to stand-up as light in a nation and become a ‘binding presence’ of God in a multi-cultural or multi-religious environment.

2. We have to work with other groups, offices, movements in the Church, and involve parents, teachers, community, other religions, government and media. We need to develop a public or community relations campaign; involving more stakeholders.

- e. Moving from media education to **media reform** then becomes a natural and necessary option.

1. It is a radical stand for the Gospel and Kingdom. It communicates our internalised Gospel values and it shall vibrate with all religions. How shall this be translated in our project funding and skills requirements?

2. The goal of media reform becomes the empowerment of civil society or helping persons rediscover and live in dignity as children of God. The Kingdom is that ‘state of being’, a ‘quality of life’.

A new praxis

Media reform and the empowerment of civil society gives us a new praxis of engagement. It is a praxis that shall vibrate with various parts and groups of a society. We can rally around it. It allows us to identify with a deeper and far-reaching cause. It enables us to work more holistically and engages us in our own on-going transformation. It becomes a process of life more than just a tool of analysis.

The Kingdom values of justice, peace, dignity, freedom remains perennial. We want to work for the building of the Kingdom of God ‘through and in’ the world of communications. Here we are responding to the call of the Church and Bishops to social advocacy as an instrument of change. The Kingdom provides **a common platform** for Christians and people of all faiths, tax collectors and prostitutes, producers and legislators of media, consumers and censors. Media reform cannot isolate but must seek to be inclusive. It engages in a dynamic of dialogue, by bringing the light of the Kingdom to bear upon all decisions and situations.

Five indicators can help us outline and recall this empowerment of civil society:

1. Persons in **integrity** with themselves, at ease to ‘be’ and who can think critically, make discriminating choices, appreciate differences and keep pace with changes.
2. **Reconnecting** to the rich traditions and spiritual values found in all our cultures or the ‘being African, Asian, Pacific, etc’.
3. A return to **families** as the basic building block of communities and nations; and providing protection and support for this basic cell.
4. Respect for **minorities**, environment, gender, and growing in justice and peace that springs from our rediscovered sense of being connected to peoples, cultures and religions.
5. **Participatory** structures and systems of learning, decision-making and governance with equal access to resources.

Future Planning

This new praxis cannot emerge without detailed and **conscientious planning** and efforts on our part. ‘Why is it that to do good we just go with goodwill, while those who plan to do evil are meticulous to the second?’⁵

To help us in this process of future planning, we have developed a matrix to **Map out ‘what is’** or what exists in our countries and regions with regards to media education (ME)⁶. We will also look at our SIGNIS organization to evaluate our strength. This is Step 1 of our process. In Step 2 we shall go out and listen to our communities and stakeholders to understand further their **needs and situations**; and capture the opportunities and threats for SIGNIS in social communications within your communities and country. We can also learn from our past, the difficulties encountered and suggestions.

Step 3 will take us to national and regional planning with an emphasis on **vision, mission, objectives and strategy**. This obviously will be done in stages, and we propose national and regional workshop cum symposiums over the next 2 years. From these planning exercises, we will be able to develop our own national and regional goals clearly spelt out and a list of programs and activities with time frame and budgets.

Step 4 will be the culmination in a **global workshop-symposium** in 2005 with maximum representation from various sectors of civil society. At the global level, we shall also deepen our understanding of the SIGNIS vision, mission, objectives and outline our corporate goals for the next 3-5 years. We trust this **organic process** from the countries and regions to help us move forward more effectively in the new millennium; and it will help us to have a more holistic understanding of SIGNIS and its role.

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Step 1: Mapping ‘what is’	National	Regional		
Step 2: Needs Analysis		National & Regional		
Step 3: Vision, Mission, Strategy		National	Regional	
Step 4: Global Symposium				Global

⁵ Professor Limlingan, Lecture on Strategy, AIM Manila 1999

⁶ At the first SIGNIS General Assembly in Rome 2001, seven desks were created within SIGNIS. They are Media Education, Training and Formation, Theology of Communication, Production, Women, Film & Film Festivals, New Technologies & websites.

Step 1 a: MAPPING EXERCISE – What exists?

Please tick under the existing programs or services within the **Catholic Church** only. Say in a few words what exists.

	No. of existing ME groups at regional and national levels	Awareness programs & target audiences	Networking with different groups	Production of supporting materials	Research	Media reform efforts
*Africa						
Asia						
Europe						
Pacific						
North America						
Latin America						
International Organisations						

*NB: Each region is to make a separate table

Step 1 b: MAPPING EXERCISE – What exists?

Please tick under the existing programs or services that are found among **other religions, government or NGOs, UN bodies**.

	Existing ME groups at regional and national levels	Awareness programs & target audiences	Networking with different groups	Production of supporting materials	Research	Media reform efforts
*Africa						
*Asia						
*Europe						
*Pacific						
*North America						
*Latin America						
*International Organisations						

*NB: Each region is to make separate table

Step 2 a: NEEDS ANALYSIS – Difficulties & Needs

	Difficulties encountered	Your needs	Suggestions for national & regional levels
Media Education (ME) groups			
Awareness programs & target audience			
Networking efforts			
Production			
Research			
Media reform			

Note: Some case studies can be written from your various programs and activities. This can be used at the national, regional and global workshop-symposium. It will be a good learning tool for others. Sharing of information on existing print, visual and AV materials will be helpful.

