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LARRY W. DRAPER

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

The Public Affairs Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in 1972 in response to a long-felt need for channeling and coordinating information about the growing Church throughout the world. The department handles news-media relations, hosts visiting dignitaries, and maintains liaison with volunteer public communications representatives called to serve in stakes and missions. Originally, the department also produced radio and television public service announcements and exhibits for temple square and other visitors centers, but these functions were later transferred to the Missionary Department of the Church. In 1983 the department’s name was expanded to Public Communications/Special Affairs after the original department merged with Special Affairs, the Church’s government and community relations office.

Forerunners to the department were the Church Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee, organized in 1935 with recently returned missionary Gordon B. Hinckley (later an apostle and counselor in the first presidency) as its director, and the Church Information Service, organized in 1957 with Theodore Cannon as director. Wendell J. Ashton was the first managing director of the Public Communications Department. Subsequent managing directors have been Heber G. Wolsey (1978–1983), Richard P. Lindsay (1983–1989), and Bruce L. Olsen (1989–).

Divisions in the department include Media Relations; National News Placement; Community Relations; Field Publications Liaison; Hosting; and Administration. Area offices with full-time directors are situated in Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; Toronto; London; Paris; Frankfurt; São Paulo; and Sydney. The headquarters staff in Salt Lake City coordinates the efforts of local public communications directors, designated to serve in the stakes, regions, and areas.

The department is responsible to, and counsels with, the Church’s Special Affairs Committee, comprised of members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy. It maintains ongoing contacts with news media at local, national, and international levels. The staff prepares and distributes both print and electronic news and feature releases about the Church, its programs, events, and activities. Public-affairs radio and television programs are produced and distributed for the use of the media and community organizations; queries from the media and the public are answered; and news media representatives are hosted. Designated spokespersons convey Church policy statements on pertinent issues to the public via the media. Designated staff members monitor legislative issues affecting the Church, its operations, and its members, and keep the leaders of the Church apprised of such developments. In addition, designated members of the staff join with representatives of other Churches and national organizations committed to combat such things as pornography, alcohol abuse, gambling, and various other social problems.

ARCH L. MADSEN

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Many public relations programs, activities, and services exist in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to support its public ministry. These efforts are coordinated by the Church Public Affairs Department and are grounded in Christ’s instruction to his disciples, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19). This instruction was repeated in revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 1:4–5; 49:11–14; 71:1–2, 84:62).

Making Christ’s gospel known throughout the world has been central to the Church’s purpose from the beginning. Sharing the gospel requires Church members to reach out to others (see joining the church; mission; tolerance). Various approaches have been used over the years to attract interest and to introduce and explain the Church, its people, and their beliefs. Now, as at first, personal communication and distribution of
printed materials, especially the Book of Mormon, are the principal methods of sharing the gospel. Joseph Smith's brother Samuel undertook the first formal missionary journey shortly after the Church was organized in April 1830. Soon, other missionaries went to the eastern United States, to Canada, and to England, taking with them the Book of Mormon as their primary teaching tool and preaching to local congregations and in homes and at street meetings. In 1831 the Church purchased a printing press and began producing newspapers, books, and broadsides (see MAGAZINES; PUBLICATIONS).

Organized missionary work is a major part of Church public relations. Since 1830, more than half a million members of the Church have served as full-time missionaries. As of 1990, they were serving in eighty-eight countries and twenty-two territories, teaching in sixty-seven languages and providing printed materials in more than fifty languages. In addition to scriptures, tracts, and other reading material, missionaries have added videotapes and other modern visual aids to their presentations.

The Church fosters cultural and social relationships with the general public through concerts, theatrical performances, and making Church buildings available for civic and educational events. For example, before its own facility was built, the Utah Symphony used the Salt Lake Tabernacle for its performances free of charge for thirty-two years. Church buildings also have been used as polling places and for town meetings and other noncommercial gatherings.

The MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR is prominent in the Church's public relations image. In early recognition of its appeal, the choir was invited to perform at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 (see EXHIBITIONS AND WORLD FAIRS). The choir's radio broadcast, presented weekly since 1929, is the longest-running network program in broadcasting history (see BROADCASTING). The choir has made more than 150 recordings, has performed at U.S. presidential inaugurations and world fairs, and has gone on many concert tours.

In 1935 the Church formed a Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee to develop ways to use the latest communications media in missionary work. The committee produced film strips, pamphlets, tracts, books, recordings, radio programs, and exhibits and supervised translations of the Book of Mormon. Under President David O. McKay, the Church began to use professional public relations consultants, who recommended that the Tabernacle Choir make recordings with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra and worked to obtain press coverage of the CUMORAH PAGEANT in New York. In 1957 the Church Information Service was begun, with a primary purpose to distribute accurate information about Church activities of interest to the general public.

In 1972 the Church formed a Department of Public Communications. In 1974 President Spencer W. Kimball stated: "When we have used the satellite and related discoveries to their greatest potential, and all the media—papers, magazines, television, radio—. . . to their greatest power, . . . then and not until then shall we approach the insistence of our Lord and Savior to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" ("When the World Will Be Converted," Regional Representatives' seminar, Apr. 4, 1974). Accordingly, the Public Affairs Department, headquartered in Salt Lake City (with smaller offices in twelve other cities), and staffed by full-time public-relations professionals, focuses on serving the

The Mormon Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Richard P. Condie, sang in Carnegie Hall, New York City, November 5, 1958, as part of an expanded public relations effort launched by the Church in the 1950s.
media and effectively using modern communications technology.

The Church makes regular use of network and cable television, radio, telephones, print, and electronic exhibits for programming and public-service advertising in many countries.

Services to the media include recorded newscasts; radio, television, and print releases; features and interviews; magazine pieces; and broadcast-quality public affairs programs. Church news regarding doctrines and activities is available through official releases. Also, Church positions on public issues such as pornography, drugs, and parenting are announced.

The Public Affairs Department coordinates the volunteer service of 3,500 local public communications directors in the stakes and missions of the Church. These individuals, many of them business and professional leaders, interact with local media and arrange coverage of Church events of local interest. They report to the Church on public reactions in their local areas and, as directed, respond to commendations and criticism.

When the Church is criticized (see ANTI-MORMON LITERATURE) or involved in controversy, the Public Affairs Department may provide responses and position statements. The standard Church response to criticism is to deal respectfully but not to debate with critics. When controversy arises, the Church strives to keep its comments within the scope of its activities, so as not to interfere with the jurisdiction of other entities.

Under the direction of the Missionary Department, the Church maintains some thirty-seven volunteer-staffed VISITORS CENTERS and HISTORICAL SITES. Volunteers also conduct tours of new and remodeled TEMPLES before they are dedicated. About ten million people annually tour Church places of interest. Distinguished visitors to Church headquarters in Salt Lake City are hosted by volunteers who arrange tours, visits to members’ homes, interviews with Church leaders or directors of WELFARE SQUARE, and visits to the FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY, the Museum of Church History and Art (see MUSEUMS), and other sites.

In 1988 the Church became a charter member of the Vision Interfaith Satellite Network, a project of twenty-two faith groups. A milestone in interdenominational cooperation, VISN provides people of faith with original, value-based cable television programs. The Church’s programs appear in the schedule fourteen or more times weekly.

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ELIZABETH M. HAGLUND

PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encourages its members at all ages to express publicly not only their faith and testimony but also their wisdom, humor, and gratitude. Anyone may be invited to speak in an LDS meeting, whether man, woman, or child. Children begin their public speaking experience by sharing two or three sentences learned at home; later, talks of original construction and longer duration are given. Subject matter may be assigned or left to the selection of the speaker. Although some Latter-day Saints write out and read their speeches aloud, that practice is less common as members mature in their gospel experience and become more confident in their speaking ability. Experienced speakers, such as Church officers, often “take no thought” beforehand (Matt. 10:19) as to precisely what they will say, but “study the word of the Lord” and then speak “as they [are] directed by the Spirit” (D&C 42:12–14). Thousands of young people who serve on MISSIONS for the Church become adept at public speaking.

Typically, an LDS speaker addresses the congregation as “brothers and sisters” and may introduce the topic by using a story, humorous event, or personal experience. The speaker then presents the substance of the speech, sometimes in traditional rhetorical form, giving general thesis statements with supporting data for each, and sometimes very informally. The information is usually based on observation, logic, authority of the SCRIPTURES, personal experience, writings of Church leaders, and sometimes comparative social or religious approaches (e.g., why Mormons may live longer than others). In summary, the speaker often declares faith in the principles discussed and testifies to their truthfulness, generally concluding