

Wired to Reach the World

With their Southern charm and innovative ideas Marcus and Joni Lamb of Daystar Television Network are changing the landscape of Christian television.

It's a Celebration Monday at Daystar Television Network studios, a multimillion-dollar facility located near the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. A good half-hour remains before the Christian network's flagship program begins its live broadcast, so the film crew pauses to pray in the parking lot before converging inside.

Behind the building several satellite dishes stretch their stiff metal necks toward the sky. On this July day they will carry Celebration into Israel, giving viewers a respite from scanning the news channels to monitor how close to their homes Hezbollah bombs will fall.

Inside the plush Daystar offices, through a maze of corridors and doorways, beyond the partitions of Studio A, Celebration hosts Marcus and Joni Lamb take their places behind what appears to be a news desk. At stage left, musicians and the Daystar Singers stand ready. The set is quiet as cameras are positioned.

Lights. Camera. Action. On Celebration, the fun starts when Marcus and Joni begin their onstage banter.

As cameras roll, the Lambs joke about Marcus' penchant for speeding and the traffic warning Joni received that morning while running late for work. But the conversation becomes more serious when they interview pastors Rodney and Adonica Howard-Browne about their church's "laughing revival," which was

featured on CNN last summer.

“So many in the body of Christ are afraid; they’re afraid of the Holy Spirit,” Howard-Browne tells them. “Ministries [try] to package the Lord into a few minutes, and they want to reach a lost and dying world. ... If we will not be ashamed of the Holy Spirit, He will not be ashamed of us.”

Daystar, Howard-Browne notes, hasn’t been afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to move in its studios. “That’s why God’s blessed [it],” he says.

The Lambs are quick to say they are just ordinary people who serve an extraordinary God—and it’s that kind of candor that seems to be their draw.

The Lambs could be the couple next door from Anytown, USA. Marcus has a dry wit and a Southern drawl (he grew up in Macon, Georgia) that makes viewers feel like pulling up a chair and staying a while. And Joni, a mother of three children ages 14, 16 and 20, has won the hearts of thousands of viewers by being herself and talking candidly about life’s struggles.

“I like the fact that they ask real questions,” says Dawna Singh, a Dallas-area resident who has been watching Daystar for more than a decade. “They make it very relevant. They stick their necks out.”

Fans of Celebration know that Daystar is not the Trinity Broadcasting Network. On TBN’s flagship show Praise the Lord, hosts Paul and Jan Crouch welcome viewers into their massive, Rococo-style palace full of stained glass and chandeliers. At

Daystar, the mood is more relaxed as the Lambs broadcast from what looks like a contemporary living room decorated with books and flat-panel TV screens.

“Being from a younger generation certainly positions [Marcus and Joni Lamb] to reach a younger generation than Paul and Jan Crouch,” Christian media consultant Phil Cooke says. “But as we move to the second generation of Christian television, we’ll find it won’t be nearly as personality-driven. Today, when it comes to a network, it’s about original programming, and the battle there has yet to be won.”

Yet in the complex and changing world of Christian broadcasting, the Lambs are carving out a place for themselves with a message and style aimed at Middle America. With millions of viewers in dozens of nations, Daystar is considered the world’s second-largest Christian television network, following TBN.

The Lambs say their mission is very simple—to reach as many people as possible with the gospel.

“It’s not about how many TV stations we can get,” Marcus says. “We could get a lot more stations, but we’ve tried to focus on getting them in the major cities so that we can reach the most people. That’s why we go on cable, why we get on satellite. It’s always about how to reach more people.

“I never had a thought or desire to build a worldwide Christian network. ... It has come together with God nudging me forward, God opening doors. ... I have done it all out of obedience.”

A Passion for Evangelism

Since the Lambs began their broadcast ministry in 1985, the couple says Daystar has grown to reach roughly 60 percent of U.S. viewers. (TBN, the largest Protestant network, reaches about 90 percent of the nation.) Daystar is seen nationally on cable, DirecTV and Dish Network, and reaches more than 200 countries via satellite and streaming Internet video.

Daystar also is the first Christian network to own a station in Washington, D.C., and in May became the first all-Christian network with its own channel in Israel, where it can be seen in every home with a television 24 hours a day.

"We didn't seek out the opportunity," Marcus says. "A group of Israeli businessmen came to us."

Daystar backed away from the deal when the Israeli leaders outlined restrictions on language translations and proselytizing. When those limitations were dropped, Daystar paid more than \$1 million in advance for the first year of broadcasting.

"Before Daystar was offered, I was only able to watch a few Christian shows a week on Sunday, which is a work day here, so it's not very practical timing," says Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson, a wife and mother living in Tel Aviv. "Now I can start every morning with the peaceful music of CreationScapes and enjoy just leaving the TV on and letting the Word get in me throughout the day."

Daystar's message reaches across the Middle East into predominantly Muslim nations such as Saudi Arabia and Iran.

"Because we know that we go into so many Muslim homes ... I say [to our audience] that we love the Arabs as well as the Jews, we love the Muslims as well as the Jewish people and the Christians, and point out that Ishmael was also the son of Abraham," Marcus says. "So the Bible said there would be a blessing on Ishmael as well as his descendants."

Daystar carries programs of prominent charismatic leaders such as Joel Osteen, Paula White, Bishop T.D. Jakes and Joyce Meyer. But viewers frequently comment on how much they enjoy the network's original programming, especially the Joni show, which in 2004 earned the Christian Talk Show of the Year award from the National Religious Broadcasters.

"We get so many e-mails that tell us it's the Christian programs we produce here that sets our network apart," Joni says.

Taped on Wednesdays, Joni addresses an array of topics. The show might feature cooking in the studio one week and broadcasting from a women's prison the next. A series on abortion included graphic footage of an abortion procedure.

Once, Joni took cameras into a gay-affirming church to explore how Christians should address the issue of homosexuality. When she tackled alcohol use among churchgoers, she took a tough stance against even casual drinking.

"The show's main purpose is to inform, educate, encourage [and] foster restoration and forgiveness," Joni says. "I try to do the show in a loving, compassionate way, not judging."

Marcus admits that he's a fan of his wife's show. "I don't

think there is anyone on Christian or secular television who is any better," he says.

The admiration is mutual. Joni describes Marcus as an "incredible, protective father ... anointed minister and businessman [and] a good steward with the Lord's money. ... He doesn't give up, perseveres, has integrity and a passion for lost humanity."

Marcus is named in The Church Report magazine among the 50 most influential Christian leaders in the United States. "I don't know why," Marcus says of the honor. "I don't deserve it, don't understand it. I'm most grateful and probably as surprised as anybody."

Marcus began preaching at age 15 and at 19 graduated magna cum laude from Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee. Joni was raised in South Carolina and accepted Christ at age 6.

She met Marcus when he preached a revival at her home church in Greenville, South Carolina. After they married in 1982, the couple began traveling across the country ministering in churches and holding revivals.

"The Bible says not to despise small beginnings," Joni says. And she has no doubt that God birthed a miracle when Daystar began.

Discarded Cameras and Crying Babies

The television ministry started soon after the Lambs visited Israel as newlyweds. Marcus says God spoke to him on the Mount

of Olives about leaving his itinerant preaching ministry and beginning the first Christian television station in Montgomery, Alabama.

God might as well have told him to part the Red Sea. The task seemed impossible.

"I immediately said to the Lord three things," Marcus told Charisma. "Why would You ask me to stop doing something You're blessing? I don't know how to build a Christian TV station. I don't have a million dollars to build a Christian TV station."

"You'd think the Lord would dialogue a bit with us, " Joni says with a smile. "All He did was repeat the same assignment."

Marcus says he told Joni more than once through the years that the cost would be great. He said to her: "We are running out of money and running out of time. ... Are you willing to lay everything on the line, take everything we have spent and saved, everything friends and family have given and borrowed to make this happen—and lose it all?"

"The Lord really used that time to train us," Joni says, "but at times it was horrible. ... The Lord helped us and met our needs, but there wasn't any kind of abundance."

In Montgomery they went on-air in 1985 as WMCN-TV 45 using three discarded cameras that made Marcus' eyes "look like a raccoon's," Joni says, and a black-and-white transmitter they converted into color. One day the three cameras blew up on them, and Marcus asked their technical assistant to help him find a way to tell the people watching what had happened.

"We plugged into audio coming from the system, turned that down and our audio up," Marcus says. "People were seeing John Gimenez of the Virginia Beach Rock Church and hearing me explain our plight and ask for their help."

Having a family was a challenge in those early days. The Lambs' infant son, Jonathan, often lay in a carrier on the studio set beside a couch. If he cried during the show, Joni would walk off the set to feed him, rock him or change his diaper. At that time, when she first joined Marcus on the air, Joni says she was hardly a self-assured talk-show host.

"For a month I was nauseous before we went on the air," she says. "I couldn't talk much. Finally one afternoon when I was getting ready, the Holy Spirit said: 'Just go and be yourself, and I'll go with you. I'll tell you what to say and even give you the questions to ask.'

"I have been doing that for 20 years. I am totally dependent on Him. He has been my teacher."

Marcus remembers when their part-time accountant erred and the studio's electricity was cut off because the power company's check bounced. "Two of our three children were born during that time, and the Lord began to deal with Marcus about going to Dallas," Joni says.

"We began to look at all the different avenues of acquiring a station already in existence. ... Through a series of extraordinary things, God allowed us to get a permit for Channel 29."

In 1990, they sold the Montgomery station for the debt they owed on it, ensuring that it would continue to broadcast Christian content as they believed God asked them to do, and moved their family to Dallas. Getting a broadcast tower in Dallas proved to be another formidable struggle. It was three years before KMPX-TV 29 went on the air.

Joni says that transition season was like starting over. But it led to unexpected growth.

“We really thought we would come here [to Dallas] and build Channel 29 and the Lord would bless it as He said He would and that would be it,” Joni says. “We had no idea that it would lead to getting a station in Atlanta, Denver, then in Seattle, then in Phoenix, Boston ... satellites around the world. It’s still sort of unbelievable.”

A Relevant Gospel

The Lambs founded Daystar Television Network in 1997, and today it already employs 225 people. Last year the network reported operational and broadcasting expenses of approximately \$50 million, costs that Marcus says were funded by airtime, production and investment revenue. Daystar also gave more than \$10 million last year to other ministries, missions groups, and social and humanitarian causes in the U.S. and abroad.

Donations from Daystar’s supporters are used exclusively for ministry expansion, such as purchasing new TV stations, and satellite and cable carriage. Daystar sponsors fundraisers called Sharathons twice annually and generates roughly \$50 million in pledges from each campaign.

"We really believe that if you give, you will be blessed," Joni says. "We've seen it in our own lives. ... We started with nothing, we are very blessed, but we have always given. Money is not inherently evil; the love of money is."

In January 2005, Daystar sold Channel 29 for \$37 million cash and the same day bought Channel 2 for \$19.5 million cash, enabling them to reach a half-million more people.

"All the way through we have seen that God's delays are not God's denials," Joni says. "Sometimes He's got something better. ... All these many years we've been doing this we understand that it's not about us. God gets all the glory."

Avoiding the pitfalls of celebrity is a challenging task in the world of Christian television, which has brought ministries not only unprecedented visibility but also significant fundraising obligations that usually are handled by way of on-air pleas and telethons. The reputation of religious broadcasting was severely compromised during the 1980s by the misuse of donated money on the part of televangelists such as Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, whose lavish spending was well-known.

At that time the Lambs were just starting out in Montgomery, a relatively small market, and Joni says their station was strongly affected. Even today, she says the lost trust has not been fully restored. "I believe there is still some negativity felt about Christian television," Joni says. "Hopefully we can change that."

How? Joni believes she and Marcus offer sincerity. They are not plastic people.

"We are a happily married couple," Joni says. "We have good days and bad days. We don't hide that. People are so hungry

for something real and relevant. We try to tackle issues [that are] real and significant in a way that is pleasing to the Lord and gives compassion, hope and encouragement.

“We’ve got the most powerful message, and we’ve packaged it wrong all these many years. Daystar is attempting to package it in a way to be pleasing.”

Of course, the Lambs realize that even Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker started out with a heart for ministry. Somewhere between the time the PTL Network started and Jim Bakker ended up in prison, priorities changed.

Says Joni: “In interviewing all of the people who fell, I was able to hopefully listen and learn from their mistakes. I don’t want to sound pious or that we could never make a mistake. The truth is, I know human nature is prone to make mistakes, but hopefully we can learn from those generals who have gone before us—good and bad.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Marcus says his most difficult day in ministry came in October 2004, when Daystar was removed from the Dish Network after a long and emotionally draining legal battle. “All those millions of people we had been witnessing to for two years were not able to see us anymore,” he recalls.

“The calls and e-mails we got from them made us heartsick. ... And the dispute was with a fellow Christian. We hated that. We’re supposed to be fighting the devil, not each other.”

Daystar spent three years in a dispute with Sky Angel, a Christian-owned satellite company that sued Colorado-based EchoStar to drop Daystar and the Southern Baptist FamilyNet from its subsidiary Dish Network. Sky Angel claimed an earlier agreement with EchoStar gave them exclusive rights to provide Christian programming on Dish Network beyond TBN and the Eternal Word Television Network.

In September 2004, Sky Angel won the dispute. "It was so devastating because we had never taken that big a blow and went backwards," Joni says.

But Marcus says his most gratifying day in ministry came in May of this year, when EchoStar returned Daystar to its national Dish Network lineup.

"God was faithful," he says. "After we were taken off, we grew bigger, Dish grew from 9 million to 12 million, and we went on [British Sky Broadcasting] in the United Kingdom—the DirecTV of Europe," Marcus says.

The Lambs are excited about what the future holds. They believe God is accelerating outpourings of His Spirit to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ. They've seen it happen in their own ministry—things that should have taken years have come about quickly. And they say the best is yet to come.

At press time, Daystar's graphic production team was completing a cartoon series for kids. And Joni was planning to write a book designed to reach women inside and outside the church. "I am just an ordinary person with an extraordinary God," Joni says. "I want to tell women that God loves them and

has a plan for their lives with hope and a relationship with Him.”

Marcus remains focused on winning souls. “My thing, of course, is to get Daystar on every cable system in the U.S.,” he says. “We’re already on satellite all over the world. Right now Daystar reaches about 60 percent of all the people of the U.S. “I don’t want just to reach every city, but every person in every city in America with the gospel.”

Marcia Davis-seale is a freelance writer based in Mount Vernon, Texas.

The Future of Christian Television

Why have so many Christians stopped watching Christian TV? Perhaps it’s because the message we broadcast has become irrelevant.

I’ve been involved in Christian television since 1973, when I was a film and television student at Oral Roberts University. I worked on Oral Roberts’ TV crew to make extra money. In those days, Roberts was the most watched Christian personality on TV, and his prime-time specials reached millions.

Religious media has changed a lot since those early days. Christian television has exploded, and today you can find multiple Christian networks on a single cable TV system, Christian stations in the most remote cities and towns, and Christian programs throughout the world. Millions of people have had the opportunity to see pastors, teachers and

evangelists of all kinds because of this remarkable medium.

We still face serious challenges in using television effectively, however. For every victory, there's often an embarrassing problem, and if we're going to have a real impact in today's media-driven culture, Christian television has to address these critical issues:

The Christian "ghetto." Christian television has fallen into the same trap as Christian radio and publishing. For the most part, we're preaching to the choir. Media ministries raise millions of dollars for evangelism, but the truth is, the vast number of people watching Christian TV on a regular basis are already believers. That's not to say producing programs for Christians is a bad thing, and I'm all for creating programs to strengthen our faith.

But we need to stop kidding ourselves. Christian television as an industry is doing little to shape the outside culture. In some places across the country, people get together to make fun of Christian broadcasting because so much of it seems out of date, silly and downright weird.

Poor packaging. The pioneers of Christian television were mostly preachers—men and women of God who saw the potential of the new medium to reach a mass audience. As a result, their content was powerful, but the quality of the programs was poor. In essence, they were weak, ineffective and sometimes embarrassing.

That's beginning to change, but not fast enough. In a media-driven culture, how the program looks is critical.

With many cable networks up to 500 channels, Christian programming faces stiff competition. So no matter how anointed a preacher is, if the program doesn't look compelling, no one will watch long enough to hear the message.

Paid-time broadcasting. When Oral Roberts worked out a historic deal with NBC in 1954 to pay for his own TV time, it was a brilliant move for the era, but this model has become a difficult burden today. Now, although Christian radio broadcasts commercials to help fund its programming, Christian television still has to ask for money on the air. As a result, viewers think Christian TV is all about begging for dollars.

Preaching an uncompromising message when you need your audience to support your ministry has created a dilemma. That's why so much TV preaching is about positive messages, financial prosperity and self-help. It's tough teaching on sin when you need a donation from the viewers. It's much easier to make them feel good about themselves.

Advertisers don't believe Christian television has a large enough audience to sponsor our programming. As a result, typical media ministries aren't very well-funded, which is the primary reason most programs are sermons and talk shows—they're the least expensive to produce. If we want to see more movies, music specials or documentaries on Christian TV, we have to change the way the programs are funded.

Jesus junk. The financial challenge has caused some TV preachers to offer odd premiums on their programs to raise money. I call it "Jesus junk." Our faith conquered the Western world; inspired the greatest art, literature and music; and was the driving force for education, freedom and civil rights. Yet Christian TV has reduced it to "miracle anointing oil,"

“prayer cloths” and “custom prophecies.”

Maybe it's good that nonbelievers aren't watching. Look at some of this junk on television, and ask yourself how they could possibly respect a religious faith that promotes such ridiculous products.

Pursuit of the “magic bullet.” The immediacy of TV, the false sense of intimacy and the financial challenges TV preachers face have encouraged them to deliver messages about the easy way out in life. They know listeners are looking for a “magic bullet” to dispel all their difficulties. If you'll just “Send in your best financial gift,” “Do whatever it takes to come to our miracle crusade,” “Call right now for our new book or tape set,” “Plant your seed” and so on, you'll be blessed.

On Christian TV you don't often hear about tough issues such as discipleship, sacrifice or intercessory prayer. That's because preachers know it's much easier for viewers to send in \$10 for a gimmick than to take the time to seek God, study the Scriptures or serve others.

Lack of accountability. I'm constantly surprised to find pastors featured on network programming who have just experienced a divorce or a church split or been accused of financial scandal. Of course we forgive those who fail, but is it really wise for them to continue their national media ministry without taking time out for repentance, rebuilding and restoration? What does casual disregard for legitimate and serious problems say to the culture about our attitude toward sin and repentance?

It's undoubtedly difficult for such a pastor or ministry

leader to step aside because the money and influence are hard to give up. But it's also tragic to see that, in spite of their fall, they never miss a day in the pulpit and their churches are as packed as ever. The independence of Christian television has been a powerful basis for its growth, but it's also created a national platform with little or no accountability.

Celebrity hothouse. Television has created a culture of Christian celebrities. The most famous pastors and ministry leaders in America use private jets because they'd be mobbed at a public airport. I saw one woman grab a famous pastor in the produce section of a grocery store and loudly beg for his autograph.

Celebrity status sometimes causes well-known ministry leaders to become hermits, sealing themselves off from outside fellowship. They become isolated and egotistical, creating the type of environment in which temptations of all kinds can flourish. The pressure is enormous, and it has resulted in divorce, shattered families, alcoholism and in some cases criminal conduct among Christian TV personalities.

Influence on theology. Technology influences our theology. From the financial needs of TV to its global influence, television exacts a steep price when it comes to honesty and integrity.

Ever wonder why so many Christian stations and networks march out the same financial "all-star team" during telethons? Telethons aren't about ministry—they're about money—and the preachers and teachers who get the phones to ring are the ones invited back. I hear them brag about their totals behind the scenes, and some aren't afraid to stretch biblical principles

to get a higher response from viewers.

So what's to be done? Do we walk away from television and turn our backs on those who use the media for ministry? Though sometimes that response may sound attractive, the truth is, it's not reasonable or even desirable. It will not be easy to change Christian TV, but here are a few places we can start:

1. Understand how electronic media shapes our message. Half the battle is recognizing the power of television, realizing its limitations and evaluating its impact on your life. Hearing a sermon on television is a dramatically different experience than hearing it in church. Never substitute television for a real worship experience, and never forget the power of face-to-face ministry with other local believers.
2. Demand more from media ministries. If audiences stopped supporting ministries based on emotion or impulse, that alone could transform Christian TV. Give because a ministry is making a difference in your life or the lives of others—not because a preacher gets “worked up” during a message.

Question erroneous teaching and preachers who act just plain weird, and call ministry leaders to account for their actions. They have a huge responsibility before God, and they should never operate outside sound biblical teaching.

3. Start influencing Christian media. TV ministries survive because of your giving, so your financial vote is more important than you realize. Respond specifically to media outreaches that are innovative, creative, scripturally sound and speak truth to the culture.

Stop looking for a “magic bullet” and get serious about your faith. The best way to stop “Jesus junk” is to stop contacting

ministries that push it. After all, if Christians gave for the right reasons, the vast majority of these issues would disappear overnight.

Christian television is an incredible tool to reach the world with the gospel, and many of these and other problems are complex and difficult. But in spite of the frustrations, financial obstacles and a few wacky preachers, I'm proud of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to using this remarkable technology. As a producer, I've certainly made my share of mistakes over the years, but the best thing we can do is pray for media ministries and support those we believe are making a profound difference in the world.

And more than anything, never forget the power of the "off" button on your remote. With some Christian TV programs, that's the best answer of all.

Phil Cooke, Ph.D., is a media consultant to ministries and churches worldwide. This conversation continues in his online blog at [http://www.philcooke.com](#), where he welcomes your comments. To hear a candid podcast with Phil about the future of Christian TV, log on at [http://www.philcooke.com/podcast](#).

Praise the Lord and Pass the Remote

In the digital universe, more Christian programming is available today than ever.

Since the 1950s when evangelist Oral Roberts began

broadcasting his healing crusades on NBC, the world of Christian television has rapidly expanded. Today there are dozens of Christian television ministries, which are offering original programming and drawing more viewers than ever before. In addition to Daystar, some of the most popular offerings are:

Trinity Broadcasting Network. Considered America's most watched faith channel, the California-based Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) is available in more than 90 million U.S. households on roughly 7,000 separate cable systems.

Founded in 1973 by Paul and Jan Crouch, TBN offers a variety of original programs that can be accessed through five distinct 24-hour Christian channels: TBN; The Church Channel, containing multidenominational church services; JCTV, the music-based youth channel; Smile of a Child, a children's channel; and TBN Enlace, designed specifically for the Hispanic community.

The Inspiration Networks. Officially launched in 1990 and led by David Cerullo, son of evangelist Morris Cerullo, The Inspiration Networks comprises four networks: The Inspiration Network (INSP), Inspirational Life Television (i-Lifetv), the Spanish-language La Familia Cosmovation and Inspiration Network International.

Available in 22 million U.S. homes, the network seeks to "shine the light of Jesus Christ" through "media and next-generation technologies." INSP, the flagship network in the U.S., features exclusive shows such as Gaither Homecoming and Inspiration Today, hosted by Cerullo.

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, Inspiration Networks is moving its base to Lancaster County, South Carolina, in a \$98 million project that will take 10 years to complete. The 93-acre campus, to be called the "City of Light," will accommodate a state-of-the-art media facility, a prayer center, international ministry training center and more.

GOD TV. Started on their kitchen table in England in 1995, Rory and Wendy Alec's GOD TV grew to become the first daily Christian network in Europe. Today it is a global media-ministry, broadcasting its flagship GOD Channel from Jerusalem to millions around the world. October was to mark GOD TV's official launch in the U.S., where more than 15 million DirecTV subscribers were expected to access the channel.

GOD TV offers programs steeped in evangelism and prophetic ministry, such as in Patricia King's Extreme Prophetic and Cindy Jacobs' God Knows. The network's flagship Rory & Wendy Show features guests such as Rick Joyner, Kim Clement and John Paul Jackson.

Sky Angel. Naples, Florida-based Sky Angel is not really a network but a delivery system. The company applied at the Federal Communications Commission for a Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) license in 1981. Now it is one of only three multi-channel DBS providers in the U.S.; the others are Dish Network and DirecTV.

Officially launching its "direct-to-home" satellite system in 1996 through a technical agreement with Dish Network, Sky Angel today offers 18 family-friendly channels in the U.S., including two Hallmark channels, FOX News Channel and The Worship Network. Founded by the late Robert W. Johnson Sr., Sky Angel plans to eventually launch its own satellite.

FamilyNet. Available in more than 30 million homes nationwide, FamilyNet offers family classics, news, teaching and lifestyle programming. The network falls under the leadership of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, which purchased it from Jerry Falwell in 1991.

FamilyNet produces a variety of original programming for teens and children, including Mary Lou's Flip Flop Shop, hosted by Olympic champion Mary Lou Retton, and TruthQuest California, featuring wayfaring teens on a quest to share truth in unusual settings. From its studios in Fort Worth, Texas, FamilyNet also produces two live programs, its flagship At Home Live! and Your Health With Dr. Richard and Cindy Becker.

Gospel Music Channel. Targeting fans from all sectors of the inspirational Christian music scene, the Gospel Music Channel was founded in 2004 by Charley Humbard, son of evangelist Rex Humbard and former general manager of digital networks for the Discovery Channel, and Brad Siegel, former general manager of TNT, TBS and TCM.

Unlike other networks targeting Christians, the Atlanta-based channel was not established as a nonprofit ministry. Instead of telethons, it features commercials by Coca Cola and Ford Motor Company between Christian music videos and original programs.

The Word Network. Owned by Adell Broadcasting, The Word Network is an urban religious channel with family programming "sensitive to the needs of the African-American community." Available in more than 40 million homes through cable and satellite systems, the network airs concerts and original gospel music programs, as well as broadcasts by ministers such

as Creflo Dollar, Noel Jones and Fred Price.

Internet TV is also becoming a popular distribution method. Companies such as Streaming Faith (), Christian TV () and Christian Netcast (www .) broadcast programming from local and nationally known ministries.

Paul Steven Ghiringhelli