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6 Jun 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...George Johnson/ANN staff

Top Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership in North America committed last month to prioritizing the church's media ministries in the region.

"[Our church] offers a message of hope to a world in need. You and I have been given the privilege of delivering that message," Dan Jackson, president for the church in North America, said at the region's first media summit.

Jackson challenged Adventist communicators to honestly evaluate whether the church is reacting to a changing media landscape. "Are we looking at all the tools that are available to us?" he said, later pledging the full support and direction of regional leadership in embracing new media.

The May 22 to 23 summit drew church leaders, lay people and media professionals to Ontario, California, to brainstorm ways church media can better connect with its audience. Among presenters were filmmaker Phil Cooke and social media guru Brian Solis.

Awareness of the church in North America does not match the considerable money spent on past media ministries and requires re-evaluation, Jackson said.

"Don't be satisfied with what you did yesterday," he said, later acknowledging that the need to expand the church's media ministries is not an indictment of past or current efforts. Rather, church leaders should take their cue from forerunners who were "on the scene" from the "very earliest development of technology," Jackson said.

"I commend all our broadcasts," he added.

The North American Division currently operates seven media ministries: Breath of Life, Esperanza TV, Faith For Today, It Is Written, La Voz de la Esperanza, LifeTalk Radio and Voice of Prophecy.

"I admire Pastor Jackson for taking ownership in this new direction that the division is taking," said Paula Sanders Morris, a summit attendee from Georgia.

Besides discussing traditional media platforms such as television and radio, attendees considered the role of social media in church ministry.

"In the past, our church has been afraid of [social media] because when you put your information out there, it isn't being moderated," said Gordon Harty, a California-based software engineer for the North America Division. "But ... if we aren't out there, we don't exist. We can either stay where we are and remain irrelevant or move forward, take the risk and stay relevant," Harty said.

Delwin Finch, pastor for Web ministries at Forest Lake Adventist Church in Apopka, Florida, said he attended the summit to hear the church's take on social media. Finch and his team enlist social media tools to enhance church services, including texting prayer requests during services, he said.

Church administration in North America is expected to review suggestions made during brainstorming sessions at the summit. A newly formed committee will study how best to implement a new media strategy for the region, leaders said.