

# A Report on Channel 7 Local News

(This report is the result of a 2008 study by a CfR committee. The committee distributed 1000 leaflets on this issue. They also met with Channel 7 management and have found results satisfying since

In November 2007, the Congregation for Reconciliation (CfR) discussed shared concerns about the relationship between Dayton's suburbs and the core city, especially the African-American community. From that discussion emerged unanimous agreement that Channel 7 local news seriously hurt that relationship by spreading fear of the city. The consensus opinion was that Channel 7's local news emphasized the reporting of violent crime within Dayton's city limits. There are two questions that we asked about Channel 7 and the local news. Two quotes from the Dayton Daily News (DDN) share our concern in raising these questions: **Does Channel 7 hurt Dayton with its violence reporting?**

*"I'm stunned that people truly believe that it's unsafe downtown or that the only people who live in Dayton are city employees or poor people. But then, look at what is in the news. How can we not start to believe that? I refer to the nightly news as the "Murder and Mayhem Show." (DDN, 1/30/08, Theresa Gasper Commentary)*

## **Does TV local news violence reporting make people fearful of entering the city?**

*"Those who perpetuate the mythology that the city is a dangerous and scary place that people can rightfully turn their backs on should be offered free deprogramming sessions." (DDN, 1/25/08, Dennis Doyle Commentary)*

Given our concern and these expressed in the Dayton Daily News, CfR established a committee to study local news coverage during the key times of 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. The committee recorded and analyzed 424 weekday news stories that were broadcast on Channels 2, 7 and 22 between March and May 2008.

After completion of the study, the committee concluded that Channel 7 (WHIO) had changed its local news coverage. It appears to have reduced the amount of reporting of crime and no longer centers its crime coverage in west Dayton. We note that shortly before our study began, a key reporter change was made by Channel 7. Channel 45 (rated second to Channel 7 for late night news) advertised that its news was more than crime and violence. For whatever reason, Channel 7 seems to have made a positive change in its news coverage. Although its news coverage is now similar to that reported by the other stations, they all concentrate a large amount of coverage on violence.

## **Conclusions**

1. Channel 7 has changed the content of its local news. It has reduced its reporting of West Dayton violent crime by no longer concentrating its violence and crime reporting in the African-American community. Our study found that Channel 7 interviewed a comparable number of whites to blacks as the other stations.

All three stations heavily emphasize crime and violence in local news coverage. While Channel 7 made positive steps in providing more balanced reporting, it still concentrates its coverage on crime and violence in the city of Dayton. 30% of its coverage was devoted to crime in Dayton as compared to 18% for Channel 2 and 13% for Channel 22.

## **Answers to Violence**

Because the community has become so accustomed to local news mainly reporting violence and accidents (“if it bleeds, it leads”), it may be necessary for stations to take extraordinary steps to limit reporting of violence and accidents. One potential answer is for the stations to establish an agreement among themselves to limit time spent reporting violence and accidents to a certain percentage of reporting per week. In addition, a cooperative staffing of investigative reporters (such as the cooperation of Channels 22 and 45 and Channels 2 and 26) could enable local news broadcasts to broaden their coverage, despite budget limitations.

## **Further Questions**

The CfR’s study and other national studies\* of local news coverage suggest that further exploration is needed to determine the following:

How influential is local news on citizen opinion?

Have local stations reduced news staff, following the national trend?

Do local stations exclude or minimize the reporting of crime in the more affluent areas of our community to satisfy advertisers?

Given that Dayton stations spend 36% of their news coverage on crime and violence, is this more than stations in other cities report on crime and violence?

## **Ratings**

The February 2008 Nielson report for the Dayton Metropolitan Area (DMA) contains the following ratings information:

<b>Station</b>	<b>Time, R/S* 5 p.m.</b>	<b>Time, R/S 5: 30 p.m.</b>	<b>Time, R/S 6 p.m.</b>	<b>Time, R/S 10: 00 p.m.</b>	<b>Time, R/S 11: 00 p.m.</b>
Ch 2	8, 14	8, 13	8, 13	—	8, 13
Ch 7	15, 27	15, 26	17, 27	—	15, 23
Ch 22	—	—	5, 9	—	5, 8
Ch 45	—	—	—	10, 14	—

\*R/S = Rating/Share, where Rating = % of households having TV and Share = % of TV watchers in DMA watching TV at that time.

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