

## **Media ethics**

### ***Introduction***

The Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) Media Ethical Policy published in March 2001 recognised that the ethical dimensions of investment in media related companies were becoming increasingly important due to the pervasive advent of electronic media. As the lines between different types of media are increasingly blurred, it is important that the CFB applies a consistent methodology in this area, given the particular ethical challenges and complexities investment in media presents. This CFB Policy Statement on Media Ethics has now been amended in light of the publication of the CFB Policy Statement on Pornography (November 2011), which it complements.

### ***Ethical themes***

The CFB recognises that many aspects of the media have positive ethical influences on society with the ability to educate, entertain and inspire individual experience. However, a number of negative ethical themes were also identified in the Position paper, Media Ethics. These included:

1. Promotion of lifestyles at variance with the Christian message
2. Sexual imagery and licentious content
3. Violence
4. Links to product marketing
5. Invasion of privacy and prurience without public interest
6. Abuse of power
7. Deception
8. Racism and xenophobia
9. Blasphemy
10. Religious intolerance

### ***Questions to be considered***

The CFB and the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) recognise that a qualitative, rather than a purely quantitative judgement is required when considering the ethics of media investment; some or all of the following questions therefore need to be considered:

1. What is the Biblical interpretation or Church teaching on particular activities?
2. To what extent can the activity or output be deemed unethical?
3. How should the activity or output be classified on a scale of concern ranging, perhaps, from 'extremely harmful' to 'mildly offensive'?
4. How accessible is the activity or output, particularly to vulnerable groups?
5. Is the company under review proactive in commissioning inappropriate product, or merely passive in allowing its services to act as a conduit for others?
6. How important in revenue or business terms is the questionable output to the company under review and is the activity or output growing as part of a concerted corporate strategy?
7. Is the company a producer/publisher or distributor/transmitter of questionable output?
8. Finally, can principles drawn from previous CFB decisions be used as a guide in assessing the activity under review in order to ensure a consistent approach?

***General media investment policy statement***

The following general principles are recommended when considering investment in media companies:

1. A distinction between production and distribution may be appropriate
2. Any criminal or illegal activity such as the gathering or misuse of private information will require swift enquiry to determine a suitable course of action
3. An attempt will be made to differentiate and understand the level of ethical concern attached to any activity under review.
4. Consideration should be given to the weight that may be attached to any positive influences.
5. There are likely to be certain activities where any exposure will be unacceptable. In such cases the companies involved should be avoided.
6. Limits on acceptable exposure to questionable activities will be decided on a case-by-case basis and by reference to previous decisions taken where appropriate.
7. Given that for the majority of companies exposure to questionable activities will be a very small proportion of the total business, a policy of constructive engagement will be the most common and progressive approach.

November 2011