

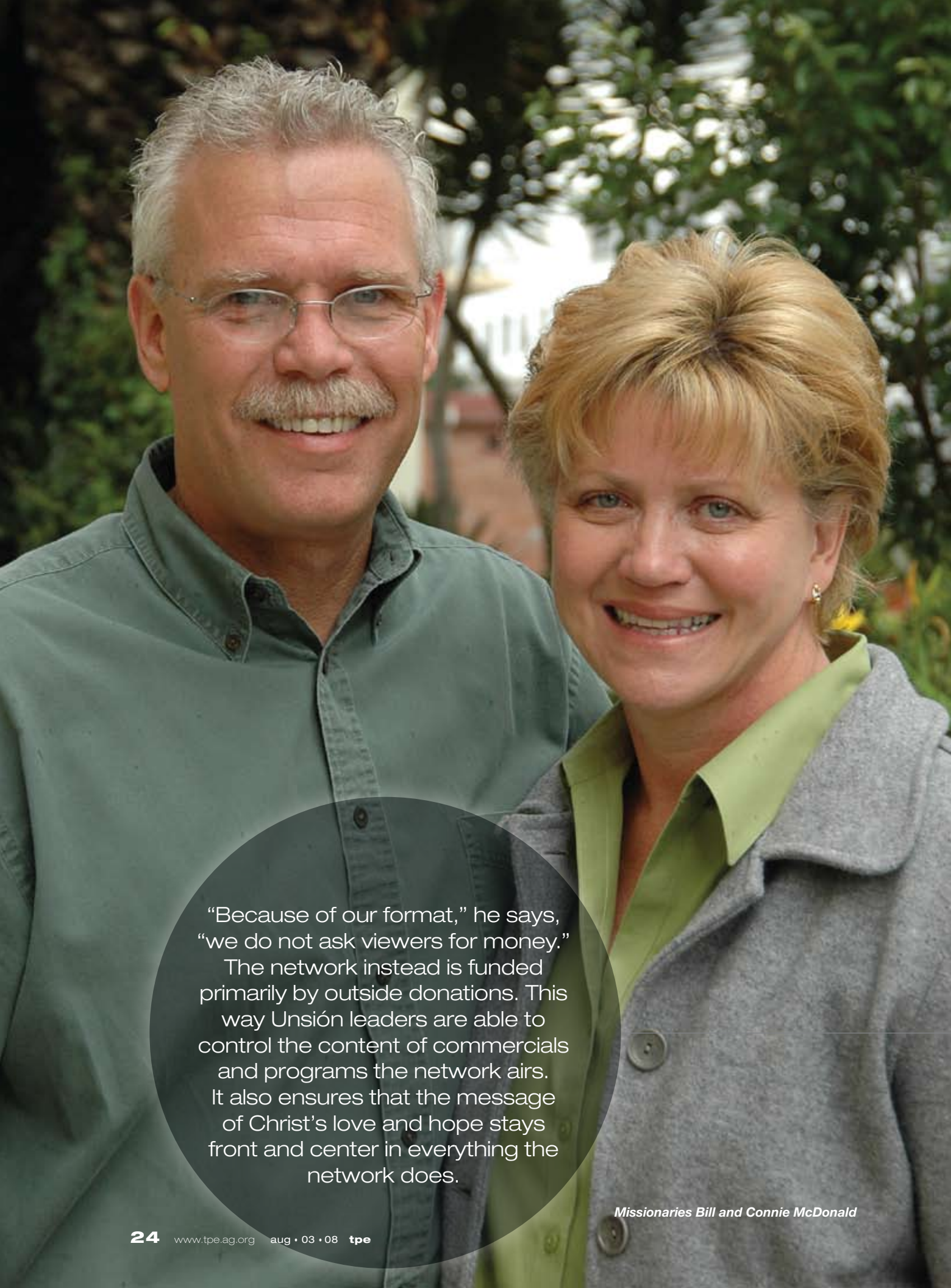
Broadcasting the message of Christ **to millions**

BY KIRK NOONAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUBRA GEORGE

The look of concern on the man's face told Bill McDonald the unannounced visit was turning serious. But before McDonald could even harness his conversational bearings the man blurted out why he had come.

"He said he heard I could heal sick people," recalls McDonald, a missionary in Ecuador. "I told him I couldn't heal anyone, but **I knew who could.**"



“Because of our format,” he says, “we do not ask viewers for money.” The network instead is funded primarily by outside donations. This way Unsi3n leaders are able to control the content of commercials and programs the network airs. It also ensures that the message of Christ’s love and hope stays front and center in everything the network does.

Missionaries Bill and Connie McDonald

The news seemed to please the man and he politely asked if McDonald or someone from Unsi3n — the television network McDonald founded in 2003 — could come to a nearby hospital and pray for his sister who was dying of cancer. McDonald asked Eduardo Gonzales, executive president of the network, to go. Two weeks later the man returned to McDonald’s apartment in Cuenca.

“He told me his sister had been miraculously healed with no medical intervention,” McDonald says. “He was very thankful and he wanted to return a favor.”

McDonald told him that was not necessary, but the man insisted. He explained to McDonald that he was the president of the Ecuadorian Cable Association and that he had seen Unsi3n.

“I would like to put Unsi3n Television on every cable system in Ecuador,” the man said with conviction.

“That sounds great,” McDonald recalls saying, though he was not sure what the man’s offer would entail or cost.

In the following days McDonald and his board investigated the offer. As they did they realized how great the offer before them was. In essence, Unsi3n was being given an opportunity to reach every community in Ecuador through cable systems. All they had to do was provide a satellite signal to make that possible, which is a pricey endeavor.

“The satellite’s footprint reaches up to 500 million Hispanic viewers, which gives us the opportunity to reach millions of them with the gospel,” says McDonald, who serves as president of Unsi3n. “Soon after we agreed to accept his offer everything changed. We needed some big-time help.”

The expansion into satellite television required financial assistance to acquire the equipment.

Speed the Light immediately offered to purchase the equipment. Within months, Unsi3n was available on 50 cable systems across Ecuador.

The expansion also called for more staff, bigger facilities, and people with the know-how to negotiate and draw up contracts between the network and local cable operators and television stations. McDonald quickly learned that running



a burgeoning television network was like riding a rocket whose jet fuel is money.

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Seeing a need

McDonald, who had no television experience before founding Unsi3n, started the network in an attempt to offer Ecuadorian viewers an alternative to the often violent and sexually explicit programming found on other channels throughout the country.

“Unsi3n uses a variety of teaching, musical and dramatic programs to present Christian values,” says David Lee, U.S. Relations director for Assemblies of God World Missions and chairman of the World Missions Media Commission.

One of Unsi3n’s hallmarks is offering family-friendly, evangelistic programs that show Christ’s



love rather than just talk about it. The network has several programs that showcase this highly engineered brand of programming that seamlessly integrates excellence in entertainment with strong presentations of the gospel.

“Our ultimate goal is to show our viewers Jesus, the One who can transform their lives,” says McDonald, noting that for two hours in the early morning and late evening the network presents ministry programming to disciple viewers interested in quality biblical training.

The gospel message is also effectively communicated through hard-hitting commercial-length mini-dramas that cover such themes as hope, unity, forgiveness and the power of prayer.

At the end of each minidrama viewers are prompted to call a phone number displayed on the screen and connect with one of the trained volunteers at the network’s counseling center, Un Buen Consejo (Good Advice). So far, more than 35,000 people have committed their lives to Christ after calling in.

Last year alone, more than 11,000 people committed their lives to Christ and were directed to a local church while they talked to Un Buen Consejo counselors.

“We believe there have been eternal dividends,” Gonzales says. “We exist to see people come to an understanding of Jesus Christ so that they will embrace Him as their Savior.”

God-given allies

During an Unsi3n staff meeting two years ago Gonzales told the story of a young man named Miguel, whom he met the Sunday before during an altar call at his church.

“I asked him why he had come to our church,” Gonzales says. “He said, ‘The craziest thing happened last night while I was flipping through the channels on my television.’”

Miguel went on to describe seeing a commercial on Unsi3n like none he had ever seen. When he was prompted to call Un Buen Consejo for prayer, he did not hesitate. Nor did he decline to accept the counselor’s invitation to attend church.

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Bill McDonald and Eduardo Gonzales inspect equipment.

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As Unsi3n continues with its expansion plans, ongoing funding is needed to reach every country where Spanish-speakers reside. Though such a goal is ambitious, McDonald has seen miraculous breakthroughs on many levels.

At the end of the service, Gonzales says, Miguel came forward to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.



“I don’t know how God can prompt a young man to tune into a television channel, call a counseling center and come to church, but He does,” McDonald says. “God definitely works in mysterious ways.”

In demand

As Unsi3n’s capabilities and influence have grown, so has the need, says McDonald, for family-friendly, evangelistic, values-oriented programming.

As evidence, he points to viewers in Cali, Colombia. When they heard about Unsi3n, they went to their cable company and asked that the network be broadcast locally. The local cable operator told them he might carry the broadcasts

if they could produce 25,000 signatures from people interested in having such a network as an option. Within months, 25,000 signatures were collected. Today more than 80,000 homes in Cali receive Unsi3n.

McDonald says people are not only coming to Christ through the efforts of the network, but culture also is being shaped in a positive way.

“He who tells the story, shapes the culture,” he says. “The God-serving storyteller will change the world one lost soul at a time by proclaiming Kingdom truths and values in a manner that gives full life to a living message.”

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One of the most recent took place when the network inked a deal to bring Unsi3n to the Gal3pagos Islands — the birthplace of Darwinism.

If McDonald had it his way, Unsi3n would be available to every Spanish-speaker in the world. Since that is yet to be a reality, he will be content getting Unsi3n into as many European and South American countries and in cities throughout the United States as quickly as funding will allow.

“It’s crucial that we reach the Spanish-speakers in this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ before someone else reaches them with a message that does not promise eternal life,” McDonald says.

By presenting an alternative to the often violent and sexually explicit programming that is so common today, Unsi3n is boldly taking the message of Christ into Spanish-speaking homes and to viewers who have never heard the good news.

That’s something to switch channels for. **tpe**

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