

## **CORPORATE STATEMENT**

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### **Harvest House Publishers, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon Comment on The Local Church's Appeal to the Texas Supreme Court**

On January 5, 2006, the Texas Court of Appeals (First District) dismissed the \$136,000,000 defamation lawsuit filed in 2001 by The Local Church/Living Stream Ministry against Harvest House Publishers and authors John Ankerberg and John Weldon. At issue was whether Ankerberg and Weldon's *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* (ECNR) had defamed The Local Church. The Court examined the language at issue and ruled that the book was not defamatory as a matter of law. The appellate opinion can be found at <http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/ruling.pdf>

No less than five friend-of-the-court briefs (representing over 1,600 broadcasters, publishers, ministries, and other organizations that were concerned about the outcome of this case) were filed with the Appellate Court on behalf of Harvest House and its authors to aid the Court in its ruling. We are deeply grateful to all those who extended their support to us in this significant way.

On August 2, 2006, The Local Church/Living Stream Ministry appealed to the Texas Supreme Court, filing a Petition for Review claiming that the Appellate Court erred "in holding that the Establishment Clause absolutely protects the publication from defamation claims" and "in holding that the [allegedly defamatory statements] are not 'of and concerning' the Local Church."

Harvest House Publishers and its authors filed a Response to the Petition on October 13, 2006. Immediately thereafter, the Association of American Publishers (AAP), representing approximately 300 members, including most of the leading general-market commercial publishers in the United States, issued a press release and filed a friend-of-the-court brief on behalf of Harvest House and its authors, strongly urging the Texas Supreme Court to deny The Local Church's Petition and stating that the opinion of the Court of Appeals was "correct in all respects." AAP has alerted the Texas Supreme Court to the extreme "chilling effect" a reversal of the appellate ruling would have on the freedom of speech of authors, publishers, and broadcasters. The AAP brief and press release can be viewed at <http://www.publishers.org/press/releases.cfm?PressReleaseArticleID=355>

It may take a few months for the Texas Supreme Court to decide whether it will ask for further legal briefing or deny The Local Church's Petition.

Recently there has been new interest generated in the case due to The Local Church's appeal to the Texas Supreme Court, the significance this case has on freedom of speech issues, the involvement of the Association of American Publishers, and the puzzling amicus support lent to The Local Church by Hank Hanegraaff, Gretchen Passantino, and others. When we are asked about these developments and the allegations that continue to be made against us, our response is as follows:

We can stand with a clear conscience before the Lord, the people of The Local Church, and all others and earnestly say that Harvest House Publishers, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon did not “falsely accuse” The Local Church of criminal misdeeds in the ECNR. Further, we used the word *cult* properly and responsibly in the book. The Appellate Court of Texas has soundly agreed, *and* we believe the Texas Supreme Court will follow suit. We will continue to persevere until The Local Church ceases its appeals.

Harvest House Publishers and its authors sharply disagree with many of the key teachings of The Local Church. We believe they hold to serious doctrinal aberrations that do not align with orthodox Christianity. We remain committed to “speaking the truth in love” when it concerns upholding biblical truth and we continue to pray for those within The Local Churches and especially for the leaders, who have persisted in continuing this lawsuit against us.

We at Harvest House Publishers, as well as John Ankerberg and John Weldon, are ever appreciative of the tremendous support and encouragement we have received, and especially the prayers that have been lifted up on our behalf, as we continue to defend ourselves in this battle. And we remain confident that truth and justice will prevail in the end. Our prayer is that the Lord will be glorified and honored by our defense of the truth and our stand in this case.