

# United Church of God *an International Association*

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## Letter from the President July 25, 2003

Dear Brethren,

Frequently, while traveling to local congregations, I am asked questions about vision. What is the vision of the United Church of God? Has it changed? How does the membership relate to that vision? Often we talk about the mission of the Church, which is certainly good and right to do. However, it is vital to know and live the *vision* God has given us, which provides the purpose and motivation for our mission.

It is also important to make the necessary distinction between a vision, a mission and the strategies used to implement them. All three are needed—whether we are discussing the Church, our personal lives, projects we undertake, etc. Spiritually (in our lives personally and in the Church as a whole) the Bible clearly articulates these areas.

Vision has to do with our ultimate goal or objective—where we want to go. Vision is the big picture. What is the big picture we have in front of us? The Kingdom of God. That vision has not changed since the prophets of old. Our vision statement goes right to that core hope: “The vision of the Church derives its inspiration and motivation from God’s purpose for humanity: *bringing many sons to glory*. God’s desire is that all be saved and live eternally in His Kingdom and in His family. Assisting in the fulfillment of that vision is the mission of the Church.” Vision should motivate us with excitement, drive and determination. Vision fires us with the desire to do the work of God! What greater responsibility can we have than to be used by God to help bring many sons to glory?

The entire chapter of Matthew 6 discusses, in one sense, keeping our vision focused and clear on the Kingdom of God. In verses 1 to 18, Christ says that our actions (charitable deeds, prayer and fasting) should be done with one focused purpose—to serve God—and not divided purposes as a show for other humans. In verses 19 to 24, He warns us about being distracted with material goods to the point of neglecting spiritual salvation. The chapter concludes with the well-known admonition: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (verse 33). The overall theme of this chapter is clear: concentrated focus on God, His righteousness and His Kingdom, and making sure our actions reflect that.

Everything we do in the Church must be serving the fulfillment of that vision. Many companies and organizations in their strategic planning will use the following guideline: “If it is serving the vision, we will keep doing it. If it is not serving the vision, we won’t.” Again, our vision is the Kingdom of God, to enter it and to assist God in His work of bringing many sons into it. Our actions must be focused clearly on that.

That brings us to mission. The mission of the Church relates more to the day-by-day work or operations of the Church. The mission statement that guides United is biblically based. It is the same mission or commission that Jesus Christ gave to the apostles: “The mission of the Church of God is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples in all nations and care for those disciples.” The mission of the Church focuses on proclaiming the gospel, working

with those God calls and caring, serving and loving God's family on earth. The mission statement flows directly from the vision statement. It is the execution of the vision and it outlines what must happen to achieve the vision. A few of the scriptures in this regard:

Matthew 28:19-20—"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Mark 16:15-16—"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

John 21:15-17—"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'"

Notice that Christ does not set a time limit on this mission. In fact, we need to be found "so doing" at His return.

How we do that mission is where strategies are formulated. How do we preach the gospel? We may have several strategies for accomplishing that mission: radio, TV, videos, the Internet, the *Good News* magazine, booklets and articles, advertising, local initiatives, public Bible lectures, etc. These categories are also refined—strategies are developed on *how* we plan to use TV and radio, how *many* booklets and what *topics* should be covered, etc. There are philosophical questions that need to be addressed that drive how we accomplish preaching the gospel. The Council of Elders has addressed those questions, and in 1999 the Council formulated the following guidelines: "Jesus Christ commissioned the Church . . . to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a *witness* (Matthew 28:19 and 24:14) . . . Moreover, their messages contained a *warning* to the listeners that their refusal to repent would result in punishment (Colossians 1:27 and 28). Furthermore, the Old Testament prophets admonished God's servants to stand in the gap and serve as watchmen (Ezekiel 22:20 and 33:1-10)."

The message is to go as a witness and have a warning component also. However, we also realize the need to give *hope now*. Gospel means "good news"! It gives good news on how to live our lives today and also the hope for the future.

Our vision and our mission from the Bible are clear. Our responsibility in the work God has given us to do is to remain focused and active in the fulfillment of the vision and mission. The vision of the Kingdom and eternal life in the family of God needs to guide us in all that we do. We then seek God's will and direction in the strategies that we use. Let us keep that vision burning brightly in our hearts and humble ourselves before our Father in carrying out the mission of the Kingdom.

In Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roy Holladay