

Home Office Update January 15, 2004

Dear Brethren,

The new calendar year has started well—and busy—for the home office. Actually, the end of December was active also as many staff members were meeting deadlines and finishing projects before January 1. A number of employees were also quite involved in the Lexington Winter Family Tournament, which again was a great success. Close to 2,000 adults, young people and children participated in the games, seminars, Bible studies and other activities. I again heard many fine comments about this event. The Cincinnati North and Lexington congregations and their pastor, Jim O'Brien, are to be thanked for their hard work.

During that weekend, Pam Stenzel, a nationally recognized speaker on sexual abstinence before marriage, gave her presentation titled "Sex Has a Price Tag." This was an excellent seminar, and a DVD is being prepared to be sent to all U.S. and Canadian pastors. VHS copies will be sent to pastors in other areas of the world. Mrs. Stenzel was entertaining, yet direct in her delivery. The information she provided about the dangers of premarital sexual relations was chilling, to say the least. Her presentation resonated well with both adults and teenagers.

The operation managers and I have started initial discussions on budget planning for the 2004-2005 fiscal year. We will need to present a budget and operation plan to the Council in late February for their consideration and approval. Your prayers would be appreciated for the wise planning in accordance with God's will of these documents. I am happy to report that our current income remains slightly above projected levels and our expenses are being held to budget. Tom Kirkpatrick has a report later on in this update.

We were pleased to welcome the Godly Leadership Task Force to the office this week, as they continue their work on preparing proposals and material for the Council and administration to consider. Members of this task force are Todd Carey, Jack Hendren, Clyde Kilough, David Myers, Larry Salyer, Bill Winner and Mark Winner (chairman).

We have some interesting reports in this update that I think you will enjoy reading. The new year for the Ambassador Bible Center has had an excellent beginning. We have a delightful group of 35 students who seem to be settling in well. Gary Antion has a section about this below. Also, John LaBissoniere has a detailed report about our efforts to assess and improve the effectiveness of our *Good News* newsstand and waiting room programs. With more needs than can be met with our finances, it is critical that we continually evaluate, refine, perhaps even eliminate underperforming projects and programs, to ensure that we are being the most effective stewards possible of the resources God provides. Last week, Gary Petty was in town to tape additional programs for *Good News* radio, and there is a report about that in this update. Finally, David Treybig comments on the second issue of *Vertical Thought* and the increase in circulation that we have already seen.

Roy Holladay

Home Office Closed on Monday, January 19

The home office will be closed on Monday, January 19, for the Martin Luther King holiday. The Ambassador Bible Center will also be closed. Some employees may be working on that day, but many will be taking the day off and there will be no receptionist answering the main phones.

Home Office Staff

Ambassador Bible Center

The fifth class of Ambassador Bible Center is now underway. We held a reception on Sunday, January 4, to welcome the 34 students, including three married couples, two married students taking the program without their spouses, and 26 single students. We expect one more student to arrive from Germany next week, bringing us to a total of 35. The group is full of excitement and enthusiasm for the learning opportunity afforded by seven months of intensive biblical and theological instruction, and we who work in the office are pleased to have the new injection of energy each ABC class brings.

At this early stage, the second week of the program, the instructors have noted that this class seems set to outdo previous classes in the number of Bible questions they ask. We instructors appreciate their questions and count it a privilege to help these young people of God's Church come to a deeper understanding of His Word.

In addition to the classes, students will be busy with work outside the office, social activities (many were already here for the Lexington Winter Family Tournament in December) and work parties in the office. Several have already contributed to the international *Good News* mailing party held here in the office last Sunday, January 11, and will be assisting again on January 25 when we begin to sort the collection of biblical reference works purchased from an estate sale. Their cheerful service is much appreciated.

Ralph Levy

E-Mail Addresses: UCGIA.org and UCG.org

We are in the process of upgrading our Web and e-mail servers at the home office. Part of this upgrade involves moving our e-mail addresses off our old e-mail server at ucgia.org to our new e-mail server at ucg.org. After this upgrade is completed, we will no longer have a ucgia.org server.

To prepare for this upgrade, we have been sending out e-mail notices that our ucgia.org addresses are about to expire. The only people who had ucgia.org addresses were people who work in the home office. Though the official john_smith@ucg.org address should have been always used, it is possible that you might have saved the john_smith@ucgia.org e-mail address in your address book.

All address books at the home office have been already upgraded. But individuals away from the home office will need to perform the following procedure.

To ensure that this change will not cause you problems, please check your address book for ucgia.org addresses. In Outlook Express, open your address book, click Find People, type ucgia.org in the E-mail field and click Find Now. If you have only a few contacts listed, you can correct the list manually. Double-click each entry and simply remove the "ia" from the address. For example, change john_smith@ucgia.org to john_smith@ucg.org.

If there are a large number of contacts and you are an ordained elder, the contacts can be replaced en masse with an address book update from the Ministerial Web site. First delete all the ucgia.org contacts that appear in the list (click the top address, scroll to the bottom, hold the shift key, click the bottom address, press the delete key). You can now import the current address book from the Email and Internet section of the Ministerial Web site (complete instructions and file downloads are there to assist you). If you need additional help, feel free to contact Paul Wasilkoff at the home office. Our primary addresses, those ending with ucg.org, will not be expiring.

Richard Kennebeck & Paul Wasilkoff

Feast of Tabernacles: Anchorage Feast Site 2004

We have over 500 people registered so far for the Anchorage, Alaska, Feast of Tabernacles site. All who have applied have been accepted and there is room for more applicants. However, new applicants most likely will be accepted to an overflow property within walking distance of the Sheraton.

Anybody who provided an e-mail address should have been contacted by now with the acceptance letter. If you haven't received one, call (970) 484-5878 or send an e-mail to USFestival@ucg.org. Those not providing an e-mail address should be receiving a letter of acceptance in a few days.

Charles Melear

Festival Travel Discounts

Thank you to the members who participated in the programs for earning travel credit for the Church during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Church earned 14 days of complimentary car rental with Avis, one free round trip with American Airlines and at least three free tickets with Delta Air Lines. If you flew on Delta during the Feast and have not turned in your ticket number, you can still do so. Send it to USFestival@ucg.org.

Charles Melear

Financial Report

As of Wednesday, January 14, the total income received in the home office for the fiscal year that began last July 1 is 4.78 percent higher than the corresponding period last fiscal year. This is very close to the increase that we budgeted for, which was a 4.46 percent increase. We are grateful to God and those who send God's tithes and offerings to the United Church of God to finance its work. We also appreciate all the employees of the work who do their part to keep spending within budgets. This is budget preparation time for UCG, and we certainly would appreciate prayers to God for His guidance and wisdom in planning for the upcoming fiscal year.

Tom Kirkpatrick

Good News Newsstand and Waiting Room Distribution

The Media and Communications Services department of the home office is always concerned about finding better, more efficient ways to reach people with the gospel message. It is critically important to periodically review *Good News* circulation and advertising methods to ensure they are producing constructive results. As successful UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) basketball coach, John Wooden, once said, "Never mistake activity for achievement." In that regard, changes have been made in the *Good News* newsstand and waiting room programs.

During the five years of the newsstand program's operation, our brethren placed a large quantity of magazines (1,228,000 copies) on newsstands and in doctor's offices, hospitals, etc. Unfortunately, the cost to do so has been high compared to the number of subscriptions that have resulted. Since 1999 we have processed only 7,171 subscription requests from insert cards in the newsstand copies. This equals a response rate of 0.6 percent and a very high cost of \$60 per subscriber. Also, responses from magazines mailed or hand-delivered to offices produced a cost per response of \$28.27, which is higher than acceptable for print media.

During the same period, many additional *Good News* advertising alternatives have been tested and successfully implemented. These include card packs, direct mail and the Internet in which new subscribers have been added to the files for just \$1 to \$6 each. As a result of this and due to our very limited advertising budget, we have determined it is now prudent to scale back newsstand and waiting room circulation in the United States. We have also asked representatives of the Church's international offices to strongly consider doing so as well. Our plan is to redirect most funds for printing and shipping these copies into more cost-effective, highly-targeted print and electronic advertising programs—mostly directed towards individual, younger-family households, ages 20 to 40. We will decrease the number of newsstand copies printed from 85,000 to 20,000 by the May/June 2004 issue.

As an example of an advertising opportunity to a younger audience, we will test an *American Baby* magazine co-op mailer in March 2004. This mailing test will reach 153,000 first-time mothers whose median age is 29. As funds are available over the next 12 to 16 months due to the reduction in newsstand quantities, we will have the resources to reach over 2,656,000 similar young family households. Of those who receive our advertisement, we could expect to add 32,000 to 48,000 brand-new *Good News* subscribers to our files. Also, we have recently been in contact with another highly-respected media company, Madison Direct Marketing, that annually mails 69,000,000 co-op packages to young families. The median age of the recipients of their mailers is 30 and there are children in these households under 12 years of age. After carefully reviewing our promotional pieces, this 20-year-old company has given us approval to participate in all of their mailing programs.

Finally, we have a plan to retrofit newsstand pedestal displays to distribute *Good News* subscription brochures and the new first-contact literature. In fact, all brethren can participate in the distribution test of the first-contact literature titled: *The Debt Trap: How Do I Get Free?* This 3-1/2 x 8-1/2 inch mini-booklet is not just a subscription brochure, but an actual *Good News* reprint article of about 1,500 words that could benefit those struggling with financial problems. Distribution of *Good News* subscription brochures and first-contact literature can be a valuable and inexpensive means for the brethren to help preach the gospel in their communities. Pastors and brethren are welcome to contact me about obtaining literature and displays by calling (888) 369-9940 or via e-mail at john_labissoniere@ucg.org.

John LaBissoniere

Good News Radio

On January 7 and 8, seven new radio programs were recorded at the home office by our host and San Antonio, Texas, pastor, Gary Petty. One of our pastors from Minnesota, Steve Myers, joined us on January 8 in the studio for in-person interviews for three of the programs. Ambassador Bible Center instructor Ralph Levy did the same on January 7 for one program. All of the remaining interviews were done over the telephone.

In addition to these seven programs, four other new programs are being drawn from material recorded on the set of the Beloit congregation's *Good News* television program and a marriage lecture recorded in Lafayette, Indiana. Here is a listing of what we covered in this round of recordings. It certainly is quite a lot of material!

1. Origins of Easter—Gary Petty with Steve Myers (from a Beloit congregation *Good News* television program).
2. Culture War Agenda—Gary Petty with Melvin Rhodes (from a Beloit congregation *Good News* television program).
3. Recipe for a Happy Marriage, Part 1—Gary Petty live lecture.
4. Recipe for a Happy Marriage, Part 2—Gary Petty live lecture.
5. Religions in Conflict—Gary Petty with Scott Ashley.
6. Burn Out—Gary Petty with John Cafourek.
7. Superpower Challenges—Gary Petty.
8. The Ten Commandments—Gary Petty with Darris McNeely and Ralph Levy.
9. Are Angels Real?—Gary Petty with Steve Myers.
10. Hope for Human Survival—Gary Petty with Steve Myers.
11. Life's Ultimate Question—Gary Petty with Steve Myers.

Editing of these new programs will be undertaken over the next two weeks. We look forward to a good response from our listeners, and pray that God will bless our efforts in that regard.

Peter Eddington

Internet Advertising

Over the past 10 weeks we ran a specialized Internet advertising campaign for new *Good News* magazine subscribers. Here in the United States we have been fortunate to add 21,053 new names to our file at a cost of just \$0.95 each. The Internet is one of our most cost-effective advertising media.

Through a special arrangement with myfree.com, we added these new subscribers—plus the company featured various articles from *The Good News* in their weekly newsletters! These included articles from our most recent editions, including “4,000 Years of Christmas,” “Why We Need a Weekly Rest Day,” “Are You Feeling Overwhelmed?” “A Woman's View of the Lord's Prayer,” plus a featured advertisement for “Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?”

A total of 3,948,100 myfree.com subscribers received these various newsletters containing teasers with links to the *Good News* magazine on our Web site. These additional featured articles in their weekly newsletters brought 1,941 people directly to our Web site to read them.

Plans are to add another 10,000 new U.S. subscribers over the coming month. Please pray for success in these advertising endeavors, as well as for the overall success of United's media efforts around the globe!

Peter Eddington

Personal Correspondence

We finished December with 111 letters and the year of 2003 with 1,081 (a 16 percent increase over 2002). We received another 1,087 questions by e-mail (a 37 percent increase).

Several people asked us questions about UCG's origins, recognizing the connection between our message and that of the WCG when it was under Mr. Armstrong's leadership. Four readers asked how to become a member of

United. One asked if we are one of “the spin-offs from the Worldwide Church of God.” Another asked what differences there are between our teachings and those of the present-day WCG. A subscriber to PCG’s publications wrote that they say that all the other Churches of God are Laodicean and then asks if we are Laodicean, too.

We handled several questions about the Sabbath, including one from a couple who wanted to know if we’re familiar with Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi’s book, which they came across in their search for the truth. They had been faithful members of a Sunday-keeping church. When they went to their pastor about their conviction that Sunday was the wrong day, he disfellowshipped them and told them that if they contacted him again, he would call the police.

We corresponded with two members in prison to encourage them and another prisoner who was recently denied parole. And we served other prisoners; three requested letters to their chaplain, formally requesting time off to observe the Sabbath and Holy Days. Another prisoner wants advice on how to avoid returning to prison, after his upcoming release. Hungry for contact with other believers, a prisoner asks our advice about continuing to attend a Sunday service, just for the sake of the fellowship. Two other prisoners asked about the possibility of some of our local members visiting them in prison (any program like that is coordinated by local pastors).

Our articles on homosexuality continue to draw letters. One subscriber suggests that we publish more on the subject. Another asks our belief and practice about homosexual clergy. A prisoner reports that his facility holds a “gay church service” and asks for our comment. Another *GN* reader wants to know if it is true that King James was homosexual (a rumor that is making the rounds).

Several *GN* subscribers took offense at the photograph of the couple with a child featured in the November-December issue, thinking it shows interracial marriage. (The couple is of the same race.)

We cannot satisfy everyone. A *Bible Study Course* student cancels because the course “isn’t esoteric enough” for him! Another *Bible Study Course* student writes that he took a Bible study course from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association many years ago and wonders if he still needs to take ours (we said yes!).

Cecil Maranville

Vertical Thought

With the completion of the second issue of *Vertical Thought*, a clearer picture of our circulation has now emerged. For the January-March 2004 issue, we mailed 3,100 copies (up from 2,500 on the first issue) directly to young people. We also sent 900 bulk copies to international areas. Added to these numbers are extra copies for the home office that will be used to fulfill new subscriptions and gift offers between now and April. Putting these three categories together, we have a print run of 5,000.

With the transition of *Youth United* magazine to *Vertical Thought*, we introduced a new, redesigned Web site. Initially, e-mail correspondence containing comments and questions declined—probably due to this change. Following the posting of this latest issue and e-mail notification to over 1,100 people (we call this e-mail notification *Vertical News*), our online readers have now connected with us once again. For the week of January 4 to 10, we received and answered 26 e-mails—a number that exceeds what we used to receive in an entire month. Interestingly, the majority of those contacting us of late are not connected with the Church and many of the messages are coming from India, Barbados, Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

David Treybig