Update on United Church of God families affected by the Wisconsin tragedy

A note from Roy Holladay, president of the United Church of God: "Facts about the March 12 tragedy at a Living Church of God Sabbath service continue to unfold. Many highly-speculative and nonfactual reports have circulated on various forums, and we will here begin to provide information as it comes in and can be verified concerning events as they relate specifically to the United Church of God. As excerpts below show from reports filed by Michael J. Hanisko, pastor of the United Church of God Milwaukee congregation, and other verified information, a number of United Church of God families continue to directly be affected by this terrible incident. Please continue to keep all of those affected in your prayers, urgently asking God for healing and comfort."

By Michael J. Hanisko with file reports

As you can well imagine, the events that took place at the Living Church of God service this past Sabbath [March 12] have shaken the entire community here in the Greater Milwaukee, Wisconsin, region. The emotional impact on both the Living Church of God and the United Church of God congregations in the region have been devastating. I'm sure you have heard some of the numerous reports provided by the media, some fairly accurate, some openly speculative [Editor's note: more than 150 media accounts have appeared worldwide of the event, including coverage in China, India, Russia, Africa and the Western nations outside of the United States].

As has been published in professional media sources already, two individuals associated with United were present at the Living Church of God service and one suffered serious wounds in the shooting. Two members of the Milwaukee United Church of God congregation had either a close family member or a spouse shot to death in the tragedy. Out of respect and for the privacy of those individuals, their names will not be printed here. Thankfully, the young people who survived the shooting have recovered to the point where they have now returned home.

I have made arrangements for a licensed professional counselor to be present at United Sabbath services this weekend. This individual specializes in trauma and crisis counseling, and we plan to have him discuss with our members and families what the signs of post-

traumatic stress disorders are, and what possible emotional and mental aftereffects one may expect after a tragedy of this magnitude.

Media attention on the tragedy has been intense. Print and electronic reporters from dozens of national and regional media outlets have interviewed members and families about the incident. Because of speculation about the shooter's motive and mental health, many have asked questions on the United Church of God's position on seeking medical attention. They have also asked several questions about United's doctrines and prophetic beliefs. As all in United know, obtaining professional medical attention is a personal matter, but the United Church of God recognizes the positive value of professional medical care, and encourages and supports its members whenever they seek professional and qualified aid. Church pastors do make positive medical referrals when the needs of members exceed the limits of pastoral counseling.

As we in United also know, as the Church encourages and supports its prophetic ministry, it insists that any speculative comments regarding biblical prophecies be labeled as such and not taught as authoritative doctrine. As is evident in our literature and public comments, while the prophetic consequences of rejecting God's law is made plain in the biblical record, the timing of when these prophesied events will specifically occur is not. As Jesus Himself told the apostles regarding this, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7)

Roy Holladay, UCG*IA* president, early in the week sent a personal note of condolence and concern to the leaders of the Living Church of God, which included a floral arrangement to help express United's concern for all.

The community, though in shock, has been supportive. What is very humbling and inspiring is to see United brethren helping out wherever and whenever they can, regardless of the need or the person who needs it.

Charles Bryce, director of church administration for the Living Church of God, traveled to Milwaukee early in the week to meet with members and families, and also with area media. He also hosted a meeting for family members and friends, which included members of the region's Living and United congregations.

I spent a good part of the first two days at the area hospital where the victims were taken and where many members of both United and Living congregations were gathering. As those wounded in the tragedy have begun their safe recovery and begun to return to their homes, the attention has shifted to the funerals and related events for the deceased killed in this senseless tragedy.

Amidst the shock and horror of this tragic event, the people in the area have been spontaneously supportive and openly sympathetic. As sometimes happens in these kinds of things, a makeshift memorial sprang up near the hotel where the shootings took place shortly after the tragedy. Many have left flowers, cards and other mementos.

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