

United Church of God *an International Association*

Robert Dick
Chairman

Clyde Kilough
President

Home Office Update December 15, 2005

Warm greetings from snowy Cincinnati!

We considered delaying for a week this Home Office Update, sensing that you may feel a bit inundated with all of the Council of Elders meeting reports as well. However, with the *Beyond Today* telecasts starting this Sunday, December 18, we decided that it was more important and timely to fill you in now on the happenings in the Church. I hope you will enjoy reading the news on the following pages.

Dee and I had a most profitable trip to New Zealand and Australia November 8 to 22, visiting the congregations in Auckland and Brisbane, as well as attending the Australian Pastoral Committee meeting, their National Council meeting and a ministerial conference. We had just enough of a taste of both countries to want to go back again someday, and we sincerely thank the members and ministers there for being such terrific hosts.

The Council meetings were quite profitable, and we even wrapped up all the agenda items a day early. It's always nice to have an extra day that you didn't plan for in order to catch up on work. We are getting ready here for the start of the seventh year of the Ambassador Bible Center classes on January 8 and, as you will see in the following report, this year's class is one of the largest ever and quite international in flavor. It is exciting to meet the incoming students and their families, and even more exciting to begin passing on to the next generation the understanding we have been given of God's Word and His plan. (Perhaps I should clarify that it is not just the "next generation," since we always have a few from the older generations attend.) So, we are looking with eager anticipation to the new school year getting under way.

In addition, we are now only a few days away from the 2005 Winter Family Weekend in Louisville, Kentucky, which is a wonderful opportunity to see and visit with over a thousand friends, old and new. I know many of you will be driving, and at this time of year safety is a major concern, so please travel carefully and wisely, and we'll see you there for a great weekend!

With kindest regards,
Clyde Kilough

Beyond Today - Eight Programs Now Recorded!

On December 7 and 8 four more *Beyond Today* video programs were recorded in the new media center. This brings our total to eight programs. The next four will be videotaped on January 11 and 12, 2006, with Darris McNeely hosting.

Beginning on December 18, *Beyond Today* will air on 105 local-community cable TV channels across the United States plus on the World Wide Web. In the United States, if you are interested in hosting the program on your local town's community-access TV station, please contact John LaBissoniere at john_labissoniere@ucg.org or by telephone at (888) 369-9940. Overall, the recordings have gone very well. Here are the eight subjects covered to date:

1. *Christmas: Mirth or Myth* (Myers, Stiver, Treybig).
2. *New Religion for the Middle East* (McNeely, Rhodes, Levy).
3. *Better Than Heaven* (Myers, Davis, Henson).
4. *Life After Death* (Petty, Stiver, Henson).
5. *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* (Petty, Kubik, Rhodes).
6. *Why Am I Here?* (Petty, Thompson, Carey).
7. *Is the Bible True?* (Petty, Seigle, Levy).
8. *The Coming War of the Worlds* (Petty, Rhodes, Carey).

Our new multimedia Web site to host these programs is now live at www.beyondtoday.tv, and we will be adding new programs as they are scheduled. You can presently view material from the first three programs! Be sure to visit and watch the video clips! You can view broadband, high-quality clips, plus download dial-up versions if you have a slower Internet connection. Very soon QuickTime files will be available for download for video i-Pods so that *Beyond Today* can be viewed while on the road!

Peter Eddington

Ambassador Bible Center Update

Ambassador Bible Center is about to begin its seventh year! We will welcome what appears to be our largest class! We have accepted 59 so far, and last-minute applications continue to come in. We have accepted eight international students this year, and 51 from 15 different states. Applicants range in age from 17 to 67.

This month we welcome Dave Register and David Johnson to the ABC staff and the home office. We have restructured the administration of ABC with a team that includes Clyde Kilough (president), Jim Franks (operation manager of Ministerial Services), Dave Register (director of education programs), Gary Antion (admissions and student affairs officer), Ralph Levy (registrar and academic officer) and David Johnson (alumni affairs and Continuing Education). We have had several constructive meetings to prepare for the upcoming class that we will welcome on January 8, 2006, with our orientation. We expect many parents and extended family to be present for that weekend in Cincinnati. Classes begin January 9.

We have also decided to change the name of the ABC Mini-Samplers to ABC Continuing Education. This new title better describes what we are offering in the local churches—continuing education for our membership. We plan to continue this part of our ABC program with three or four Continuing Education sessions in various locations around the United States and Canada in the summer and fall of 2006.

Dave Register

Ambassador Bible Center Classes on CD

In early January 2006 we will mail two more Ambassador Bible Center classes out to local congregations on MP3 CDs and also post them on the ABC section of our Web site. The two classes are the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul. Instead of sending the four-volume set, with 20 audiotapes in each volume like in years past, just two CDs will be mailed containing all the information from the classes.

This cuts the cost of duplication to one fortieth, or less, of the audiotape version, and cuts mailing costs a great deal. We tried this for the first time with two classes last year and it worked very well. Also, duplication of the entire set of classes is very simple by the local congregation since just one or two CDs have to be copied. Generational loss of quality is also then negligible.

Peter Eddington

Sermon Video Program to Go DVD

Beginning in January of 2006 we aim to begin producing our sermon videos on DVD. In January of 2005 we shifted from sermon audiotapes to MP3 CDs, which has realized great savings for the Ministerial Services sermon tape program. Switching to DVDs for the videos will be more involved than it was for the MP3 CDs, but once again considerable cost savings will be gleaned.

To help make it cost effective, we will include four sermons on one disc. One piece of technology that makes this possible, and which is now readily available, includes the ability for us to make dual-layer DVDs at the home office, enabling at least four hours of programming on one disc—two hours per layer. Therefore, instead of sending out eight videotapes each time, we will simply send two DVDs. Both duplicating and mailing costs will be greatly reduced. We'll keep you posted as we get closer to implementation.

Peter Eddington

4 Millionth Booklet Printed

This month we passed another major milestone in the work of the United Church of God—we printed our 4 millionth booklet!

It took us over four years to print our first million. This year alone we've printed 740,000—our largest number yet, surpassing our previous high of 690,000 last year.

The largest single number of booklets printed was our new *Marriage and Family* booklet, with 140,000 copies printed. Yet demands for our other booklets remain strong.

We reprint most of our booklets once a year as supplies run low. However, demand was so great for four booklets—*Why Does God Allow Suffering? Are We Living in the Time of the End? The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Creation or Evolution*—that we ran out far earlier than anticipated, and we ended up printing them twice this year. We printed 60,000 to 70,000 of each of those four titles this year.

In round numbers, we currently distribute an average of about 25,000 of each our 32 booklets every year.

We appreciate the generosity of our members that makes it possible for us to reach so many people with these priceless truths.

Scott Ashley

Good News Newsstand Distribution

As you may recall, a decision was made in December 2003 to decrease the quantity of *Good News* newsstand magazines in the United States from 85,000 to 25,000 per issue. That decision centered on the high cost to maintain the program compared to other less-expensive methods available to reach the public. Since then, costs for printing, postage and shipping have risen dramatically. The cost of adding one new subscriber to the *Good News* file through newsstand distribution has now climbed to an average of \$98, primarily, it seems, because many people are content to pick up their copy at the newsstand rather than subscribe. Even though these are certainly not wasted magazines, we cannot financially justify supporting this program, especially when we have other advertising methods that add subscribers for \$1 to \$6 each.

As a result, *Good News* newsstand distribution, as a regular, ongoing program, is being discontinued as of the January/February 2006 issue. The program has also been discontinued in other countries. This decision in no way detracts from the excellent work the brethren have performed in distributing *The Good News*. Their efforts have been greatly appreciated.

We now encourage the brethren to use the newsstand displays to distribute our inexpensive, yet attractive “take-one” brochures. Four 3½” by 8½” brochures are available for display in stores and shops. These four-color advertisements include *Why Does God Allow Suffering? Is This the Time of the End? The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*. The brochures offer potential readers booklets by the same titles and a subscription to *The Good News*. All brethren can participate in this cost-effective program and are welcome to write or call for a supply of brochures and displays.

John LaBissoniere

GN Print Advertising

As reported earlier, funds for *Good News* print advertising this fiscal year are targeting a young-family audience. Using *American Baby* “co-op” mailers, our bifold subscription brochures titled “Are You Prepared to Teach Values?” are being mailed to 3.3 million first-time mothers. This effort follows up on a similar one conducted last year when 1.6 million new mothers, with a median age of 28, were contacted by mail. Response to that campaign has been excellent. With subscriptions still arriving, 15,673 responses have been tabulated at a cost per response of just \$5.07.

Also, beginning in October 2005, we began distributing 478,000 subscription brochures on large, attractive “Good Neighbor” displays located in the entrances and exits of major supermarkets and discount stores in the United States. Since demographic studies confirm the median age of store visitors is 39, we can be assured that many of our “take one” brochures are being picked up by younger individuals. Response to last year’s campaign has been excellent. With subscriptions still coming in, 14,719 responses have been tabulated at a cost per response of only \$3.28.

Additionally, this fiscal year we are reaching out to 600,000 parents of home-schooled children through card pack direct mailings. Demographic studies specify the median age of our targeted audience is 38. During the 2004-2005 fiscal year 3,044 subscriptions were added to our files through a similar campaign. Besides mailing to this audience, we also offered *Good News* subscriptions through various other card pack mailings. Overall last year, 78,344 new subscribers were added through card packs at a cost per response of just \$2.

As always, we would greatly appreciate your prayers that our ongoing mailing and distribution programs would successfully encourage many more people to become *Good News* subscribers.

John LaBissioniere

Managing Editor Meeting on January 24 and 25

A Media and Communications Services meeting will be held at the home office on January 24 and 25, 2006, with the managing editors of the Church’s larger publications plus key media department personnel. The meeting will focus on our media approach and content, plus cross-promotion of the upcoming editions of our various publications and media efforts. We’d certainly appreciate your prayers that the Church’s proclamation efforts will be successful in the coming year as we plan for exciting new opportunities and look for steady growth.

Peter Eddington

Personal Correspondence

We hit the century mark again in November’s PCD letter volume—exactly 100 (plus 1 PCD e-mail). The Internet Personal Correspondence team handled another 95. Here is a summary of the highlights.

We had three baptism requests from inmates who seem ready to meet with our pastors. One grew up in the Church of God, made some terrible decisions and now he is turning his life around with God’s help. A listener to the radio program requested prayer for healing and an anointed cloth (obviously the person has some background with the Church, although he did not explain it). A subscriber responded to the article on the Holy Days in the September-October *Good News* with a request for specific guidelines on how to observe the feasts.

We heard from two individuals affected by recent natural disasters. One said he was a survivor of the Kashmir earthquake who lost his entire family. He asked us to bring him to the United States and put him through school. Another requested prayer for family members who had to evacuate from New Orleans.

In the unusual category, someone asked us to explain why we separated from the WCG. He also requested their mailing address, saying that he intended to ask them the same question in order to compare the answers. An inmate asked us to credential him to perform marriages in the state in which he is incarcerated. He assured us that he believes that only men and women should marry, but he did not explain how he would be able to perform marriages. (Of course, we did not “credential” him.) Another inmate told of conflicts he is encountering, as he pursues his crusade of converting the guards and administrators; if they do not respond, he has apparently been condemning them to the lake of fire. Still another inmate seeks permission to begin Bible studies in his personal quest to convert every last inmate in his facility. An inmate in a California institution wrote to our post office box in Kenya. He put a 37¢ stamp on the envelope; it went all of the way to Kenya, where it was forwarded to the home post office box of John Elliott in the United States — all for the same 37¢!

Cecil Maranville