

# United Church of God *an International Association*

Robert Dick  
Chairman

Clyde Kilough  
President

## Home Office Update September 7, 2006

Greetings Everyone,

We just completed an exceptionally busy five weeks here at the home office, beginning with the Council of Elders meeting, then the ABC graduation, the weeklong ABC Continuing Education program and the leadership weekend. Sandwiched in between, Dee and I traveled to South Africa to visit the Johannesburg congregation plus attend the National Council meeting and a ministerial conference.

You can read the details on these events elsewhere in this update, but I would like to comment here just a bit about God's work in South Africa. Arriving on Thursday evening, we stayed in Johannesburg with Bill and Cheryl Jahns. The Jahns volunteered a few years ago to transfer from Salt Lake City, Utah, to South Africa for a five-year stint. Their service, coming at a time when there was a manpower shortage, has been invaluable to the Church. And if you ever have a chance to talk with the Jahns about it, they will tell you what a life-changing experience it has been for them personally. They also serve in overseeing the churches in Malawi. Gladstone Chonde, the elder in Malawi, and his wife, Alice, were staying with the Jahns, as were Kambani and Shirley Banda, who serve the churches in Zambia. We were grateful for the extra time to get to know the Bandas and Chondes and become familiar with what is happening in their respective areas.

Our time with the members in Johannesburg on the Sabbath was delightful, and they served a delicious curry and rice dinner. We only regret not being able to visit the congregations in East London, Durban and Cape Town, but maybe that will come at another time. Below is a chart, taken from the August report, of the Sabbath attendances in the congregations in southern Africa:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Pastor</u>	<u>Average attendance</u>	<u>High attendance</u>
Cape Town	Stan Botha	28	32
East London	Neil Becker	25	30
Johannesburg	Bill Jahns	94	110
Durban	André van Belkum	60	65
Zambia	Kambani Banda	141	163
Malawi	Gladstone Chonde	80	113
Zimbabwe	Kambani Banda	20	30

The congregations are settled and supportive, the entire area is growing, and much of our time in the ministerial conference centered on developing manpower to help serve those God is calling into His way of life.

On Sunday we traveled to Kruger National Park, a world-renowned game preserve, for the National Council meeting and conference. At the Council meeting, Neil Becker, who together with his wife, Erlene, and daughter, Leanne, handles all mail out of their homes in East London, gave an office update. The group discussed the budget for the next financial year, and the outlook is encouraging. A particularly bright spot has been the responses from our Web site. Recently a record number of over 100 requests per day for *The Good News* were received at the office.

The next three days were set aside for matters relating to the ministry and, especially, the future leadership of the Church. We addressed subjects such as seeking and developing greater personal spiritual effectiveness, what to look for in leaders, how to mentor and develop those who respond positively and how Ministerial Services is structuring more effective leadership development programs.

We had a wonderful spirit of camaraderie, and the stunning setting of Kruger Park certainly added to it. Driving the roads there always keeps your senses attuned to spotting some of the most magnificent animals in God's creation. We saw, sometimes at very close range, lions, Cape buffalo, elephants, rhinos, hippos, baboons, giraffes, zebras, various species in the antelope family ranging from the regal kudu to the diminutive steenbok, colorful birds and even a black mamba (a deadly poisonous snake). On one occasion we came across two male lions that had made a kill on the road and were lying with extended bellies close to where our vehicles were.

Some weeks ago Jim Franks mentioned in a Compass Check that they have a saying in that part of the world: "If you ever come to Africa, you will always want to return." We certainly found that to be true. Mr. Franks and his wife, Sharron, are currently in Kenya, and we'll look forward to their report upon their return.

Now we turn our attention to the soon-coming Holy Day season. No matter where you travel in the world, the need for God's Kingdom is so evident. What the Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day picture is truly incredible, and gives us such great hope for the future of humanity. Africa suffers so much, in so many ways. Some have commented, "We don't fear the tribulation . . . we are already living it!" Yet people are suffering all over. Even those in wealth so often suffer the penalties from spiritual and moral poverty. We so desperately need the reign of Jesus Christ to bring to them the way of life that will change their world. Through the meaning of the festivals, we see the hope that lies ahead.

I hope and pray that you will have a true feast of God's Word in the next few weeks, and that the Holy Days and Feast will help keep all of us focused more than ever on seeking first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness.

Take care, and do remember our brethren in Africa.

*Clyde Kilough*

### **MINISTERIAL SERVICES**

As the summer winds down, it has been very busy in Ministerial Services. We just completed our fifth Leadership Workshop here in Cincinnati (2002 through 2006) on Monday, Sept. 4. We had nine couples from the United States and four couples from Canada and South Africa attend the workshop. Since its beginning in 2002, the workshop has served to train men and women for greater works of service in the local congregations. We have also been able to hire several men as a result of these workshops. Originally they began as part of the Ministerial Candidate Program, but we soon realized that it was a misnomer to refer to the program as a "candidate" program for the ministry. Within a couple of years we broadened the idea of leadership development to include all aspects of service in a local congregation.

The attendees are all recommended and approved by the local pastors and regional pastors. Richard Pinelli is responsible for developing the agenda and planning the sessions for this weekend under the new Ministerial Development Program. The weekend was a great success with approximately 32 hours of presentations and workshops. Lyle Welty, Richard Pinelli, David Register, Clyde Kilough, David Johnson, Jim Franks, Judy Servidio and Dee Kilough were all involved in presenting topics to the group. On the Sabbath a combined service was held of the Cincinnati East AM and PM congregations with 275 in attendance. It was a great weekend for all involved.

*Jim Franks*

### **Ambassador Bible Center Update**

We held our seventh ABC graduation on Sunday, Aug. 13. Fifty-three students received certificates after the seven-month program. This was our largest graduating class!

Graduation weekend included a special Sabbath service with split sermons from Dave Register, education programs director, and Jim Franks, Ministerial Services operation manager. With family and friends in town for the graduation weekend, we had a record attendance of nearly 500 for the Cincinnati East congregations.

On graduation day we had a “family and friends brunch” at deSha’s Restaurant in nearby Montgomery, Ohio, and a standing-room-only crowd for graduation Sunday afternoon. United Church of God President Clyde Kilough gave the graduation address titled, “Reflecting the Light.” After receiving their certificates, the graduating class and their families celebrated at a champagne reception and released a thousand balloons into the Cincinnati sky. The weather turned out to be perfect for the special occasion. Most of the students have left and returned home, and it seems very quiet around the home office now.

We are now busy reviewing applications for next year’s class. We have accepted 50 students for ABC next year, and we have received several additional applications that are currently being processed. We have decided to close class enrollment at 60 for next year. We anticipate this will be the first year that we will have more applicants than space in our classroom at the home office.

ABC has grown to be an integral part of our overall educational efforts. The ABC administrative team will have a series of meetings during the last week of September to discuss the future of ABC, including administrative issues, the admissions process, our curriculum, faculty and instructor assignments, student housing and several other issues. Your continuing prayers for ABC and its future are much appreciated!

*Dave Register*

### **ABC Continuing Education Seminars**

Through the ABC Continuing Education Seminars (formerly known as Mini-Samplers), we are attempting to share a portion of the Ambassador Bible Center experience with members in the local church areas. Their support has made it possible for us to provide a unique and intense seven-month program of biblical instruction. The seminars give us the opportunity to share a small portion of that instruction with those who are unable to participate in the full program.

Our Continuing Education schedule begins with a five-day seminar held here at the home office shortly after the ABC students graduate. This year’s program, held on Aug. 21 through 25, hosted the largest group so far. Fifty-seven participants registered and received 30 hours of classroom instruction. Most were from the upper Midwest, but some came from as far away as Florida, Alabama and North Carolina. This year six different presenters taught sessions covering a wide variety of subjects. The seminar began with a presentation by the Church president, Clyde Kilough, on the subject of “The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth.” Other presentations included “How Postmodernism Affects Our Thinking,” by director of education David Register; “Ephesians—Keys to Godly Unity” by ABC instructor and continuing education coordinator David Johnson; “Hosea—The Apostle John of the Old Testament” by instructor and admissions officer Gary Antion; “Principles of Prophecy and the Book of Ezekiel” by instructor and academic officer Ralph Levy; and “Introduction to Doctrine/The Divinity of Christ” by Ministerial Services operation manager Jim Franks. The response from the attendees was very encouraging and positive. Several of those participating have attended this five-day seminar every year since it began, and many others said they would be planning to return next year.

In addition to the five-day seminar, we have scheduled four more weekend seminars conducted in various locations around the United States and Canada prior to the resumption of ABC classes in January 2007. These two-day seminars begin with Sabbath services and include 11 to 12 hours of classroom instruction. This year we have focused our efforts on presenting seminars in places that have not had the opportunity for a seminar in the past. The next scheduled ABC Continuing Education Seminar will be in Denver, Colorado, the weekend of September 9 and 10. Additional weekend seminars are scheduled for Atlanta, Georgia (October 28-29); Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas (November 4-5); Calgary, Alberta (November 11-12); and Morton, Illinois (November 18-19).

Some church areas have already contacted us about hosting seminars in 2007, and we hope to put together our schedule shortly. Travel and lodging expenses for the presenters are covered by the ABC budget, so local church areas are only responsible for additional local expenses. In this way we hope to reach as many areas as possible without putting a financial burden on anyone.

*David Johnson*

## **First United Youth Camp in Nigeria**

The United Church of God was able to host its first summer camp for the teens in the West African nation of Nigeria Aug. 22 to 28. The camp was held 30 miles west of Abeokuta in Ogun State, Nigeria. Since I had experience working with Oludare Akinbo (our Nigerian elder) at the Ghana camp the past four years, Fred Kellers (senior pastor of Nigeria) asked me to assist him in this first-ever UCG camp in Nigeria.

After going to the youth camp in Ghana with the United Youth Corps volunteers, I flew to Lagos, Nigeria, on Aug. 20. I had the privilege of staying with our elder, Dare Akinbo, and his family in preparation for the camp. Dare did a wonderful job organizing and staffing the summer camp with young adults in the Church, many of whom were campers and staff at the Nigerian SEP in the early 1990s. Thirty-one teenagers from all over Nigeria (Lagos, Ibadan, Benin City, Owerri and Abuja) attended the camp, and thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship and the activities that were provided. Volleyball, soccer, team challenge, computer appreciation and Christian Living were activities that made up the program for the camp in Nigeria.

In the past three years, 10 to 12 Nigerian youth were able to travel to Ghana to attend summer camp there with the Ghanaian teens. However, it was decided this year to host a smaller camp within Nigeria, which would give *all* of the teens an opportunity to attend—coupled with the invaluable experience and leadership training that many of the young adult staff members were able to receive.

A member from the Dallas, Texas, congregation, Greg Peoples, was able to fly to Nigeria to assist in staffing the camp. The “African experience” was great for Greg, and he set a wonderful example of enthusiasm and appreciation for the Nigerian youth and members.

Overall, the camp was a great reflection of the focus and outcomes we seek at our United Youth Camps in the United States and elsewhere. We focused on “the Zone” and, most importantly, on training for God’s soon-coming Kingdom. Clearly, camps like this in West Africa are a wonderful blessing for the younger generation, offering great opportunity for growth and leadership development in our future leaders!

*Doug Horchak*

## **Personal Correspondence**

We had 59 surface mail letters and 153 e-mails that required a doctrinal response for the month of August. As always, they ranged from positive to negative, and sometimes quite unusual.

Several asked questions about the United Church of God. One asked if we are the same as the Seventh-Day Adventists, and another blasted us for implying on our Web site (which says nothing of SDAs) that we are SDA. A reader asked if we claim we have the only message or if we only say our message is the best one. He listed several religions by name, asking if we claim they are wrong and then, he asked us to define “wrong.” Another reader asked if we are Jehovah’s Witnesses and still another if we are the same as the United Church of Canada. One asked why we exist, seeing that there are many groups that already say they teach the Bible. A reader aware of the existence of different Church of God groups asked what divides the groups and if they all teach the same doctrines.

In the “unusual” category, a Muslim reader asked the identity of “the Elijah to come.” A subscriber wanted to know how the New Jerusalem would be able to pass through the dangers of outer space en route to earth without suffering great damage. A male asked why most women believe the Bible, yet are unwilling to discuss the woman’s role in “the demise of paradise.” A reader of *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* slammed us for saying Pentecost is on a Sunday in 2007, accusing us of following the world’s desire to keep Sunday. It is unclear if he realizes we are Sabbath keepers. A reader of *The Church Jesus Built* criticized us for what he perceives as supporting Catholicism and denigrating Martin Luther. A reader convicted of the need to keep the Sabbath argues that we should determine when the Sabbath falls by the moon.

We had two unusual inmate requests. One wanted us to write his chaplain to tell him that the inmate is *not* associated with the United Church of God! Another wanted us to write the chaplain to say the inmate *is* associated with the United Church of God, even though the inmate is a Messianic Jew with no desire to become part of our organization. It seems his group isn't able to get permission for him to keep the Holy Days, and he thought we could make it happen. Honesty is not an issue!

*Cecil Maranville and David Evans*

### **Vertical Thought Personal Correspondence**

In the month of August the *Vertical Thought* personal correspondence team fielded 46 letters. There seemed to be a higher than normal interest in prophecy this month. One person asked about the Antichrist, wanting to know who this is and if this person is “in the world” right now. Another wanted us to explain about the key of David found in Revelation 3, and still another wanted to know about the mark of the Beast, specifically wondering if the United Church of God has been able to determine exactly what it is, perhaps social security numbers or credit cards. Credit card bills can surely become oppressive—even beastly, but we don't believe that will be the mark of the Beast!

Some weeks back we had a question about body piercings and earrings on men. We took some time formulating the answer to this question, sending it through the review team to make sure we are accurate and just in what we wrote. The answer went out this month, and is on the VT Web site and will be printed in the Q&A section of the magazine as well.

*Tom Clark*

## **MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES**

### **U.S. Brethren Needed to Distribute Brochures**

Two new *Good News* “take one” subscription brochures are now available for distribution by our brethren in the United States. One brochure features a cover photo of a lion and lamb with the headline “Will Our World Ever See Lasting Peace?” The second covers a topic that always receives high response, “What Happens After Death?” Members who occasionally visit stores, hairdressers, senior centers, restaurants, libraries or other places within their communities may find them to be excellent distribution locations for brochure displays. Even if only a single display is placed and maintained, it would be a valuable contribution. Brethren are welcome to order a supply of brochures and displays by contacting John LaBissoniere at 198 McDeerman Road, Jacksboro, TN 37757, by toll-free telephone at (888) 369-9940 or by e-mail at [john\\_labissoniere@ucg.org](mailto:john_labissoniere@ucg.org).

*John LaBissoniere*

### **Big Increase in Internet Visitors**

Visitors to the Church's six main Web sites increased from 375,640 for the month of August, up from 197,916 in February. This is an increase of 89 percent in just six months—a very favorable rise in traffic indeed! These six Web sites include: [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org), [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org), [www.verticalthought.org](http://www.verticalthought.org), [www.beyondtoday.tv](http://www.beyondtoday.tv), [www.wnponline.org](http://www.wnponline.org) and [www.thisistheway.org](http://www.thisistheway.org).

Ongoing improvements and technical advances keep United's Web sites on the forefront of technological advancement and presentation—including more video, webcasting, podcasting and search capabilities.

*Peter Eddington*

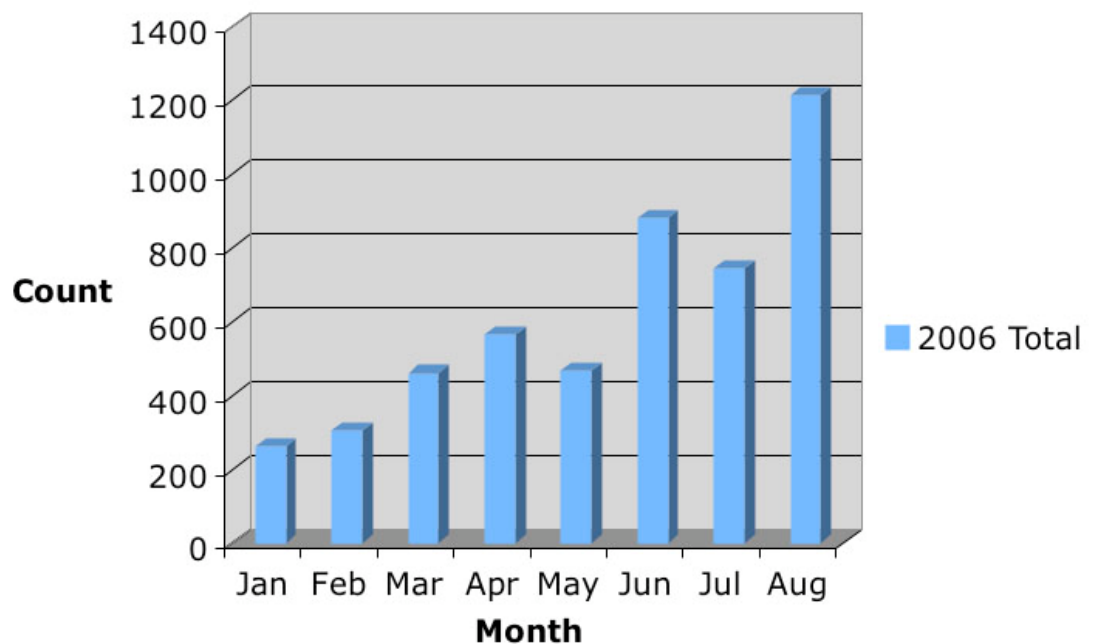
### **Record-breaking Month for *Beyond Today***

We're very thankful for a record-breaking month for responses to the Church's *Beyond Today* video program—1,215 in all from telephone calls and the Internet! This is a 63 percent increase over July, and a 38 percent increase over June (our previous record month).

We're very thankful for the continued improvement in the quality and content of the main United Church of God video proclamation effort, and thank the team of technicians, hosts and guests that help to make it all possible. As we know, all thanks go to our Heavenly Father who has blessed our efforts. He has provided many willing hands in our local U.S. congregations to serve as sponsors. They are diligently airing the program in their cities on free, cable-access community television, for which we're very thankful. If *Beyond Today* is not yet airing in your U.S. town and you have cable-access channels, please contact John LaBissoniere by e-mail at [john\\_labissoniere@ucg.org](mailto:john_labissoniere@ucg.org) to become a sponsor!

Following is a graphical depiction of responses so far for 2006. It's very encouraging to see a continued upward trend overall:

### 2006 Beyond Today Phone and Internet Responses



*Peter Eddington*

#### **Beyond Today Recordings**

Sept. 6 and 7 this week saw four new *Beyond Today* video programs recorded. Steve Myers was the host of this round of programs. Topics in the lineup include:

1. Halloween, Treat or Trick? (Myers, Stiver)
2. Is There Really a Devil? (Myers, Stiver, Levy)
3. Why Give Thanks? (Myers, Antion, Register)
4. Marketing Evil (Myers, Antion, Register)

Please pray for the continued success of our relatively new video efforts. Responses continue to increase from month to month overall, and the program is making some excellent headway. In October, soon after the Feast of Tabernacles, a two-day production meeting will be held to plan the 2007 calendar-year season for *Beyond Today*.

*Peter Eddington*