

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy O. Holladay
President

Letter From the Chairman April 4, 2003

Greetings Brethren,

With good news in increasingly short supply these days, the approaching Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are certainly more welcome than ever. God's timeless and enduring message of salvation for humanity, revealed through the meaning of His Holy Days, is good news for which we are truly thankful.

As we consider our spiritual needs, and make our physical plans for the festivals, let's keep in mind the difficulties some of our brethren face. A report last week from one of the members in Zimbabwe to André van Belkum demonstrates the challenges some encounter that affect their ability to even keep the Passover with others:

“We continue braving the worsening economic crisis. Inflation now exceeds 200 percent. The fuel situation is particularly worrying. Deliveries are made twice a week on the same day throughout the country. The congestion and anarchy at fuel stations on delivery days is something one cannot fully describe. Today [we] spent the whole day from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and did not get any. Hundreds of cars were not served. The reaction of motorists when it is announced that petrol has run out is always amazing—no yelling or rowdiness. People quietly drive off empty handed after days of waiting. We request prayers as we will need fuel to travel for Passover.”

Situations such as this serve as a good lead-in to the main subject of this letter.

In the March 13 “President's Letter,” Roy Holladay addressed our obligations, both as a church and as individuals, to help those who are in financial need. He noted that the United Church of God home office staff and ministry is striving to combine three methods—church assistance, better education about government aid and good works programs—to effectively supply what sometimes is lacking and causing brethren to suffer.

The Church teaches, of course, that tithing is a fundamental part of God's way of life. Furthermore, besides the biblical requirement to tithe, members of the Body of Christ are enjoined to take special care of those in need. Here is where “good works programs” especially come into play. Paul wrote, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). You can read in his epistles of situations where members went above and beyond to help others in crises.

We strongly encourage individuals, families, congregations, youth groups, our ABC classes, etc., to regularly donate some of their time and activity to humanitarian causes as they are able. Much suffering exists in the world, and we are not to stand idly by and wait for the Kingdom of God to come to solve all the problems. Jesus Christ will indeed solve all the problems, but His way of thinking that will govern His Kingdom must be in the hearts of His people today. In a world where iniquity is abounding and love, as a result, is growing cold, it is important for our own good that we maintain a heart of compassion.

Paul also told the elders at Ephesus, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Anyone on the receiving end is blessed, of course, but one of the greater blessings of giving is that it keeps us looking outwardly, keeps us mindful of others, keeps us less self-centered—in other words, it helps to keep us in the mind of Christ.

This is why, while we cannot solve the problems in this world, we can and should help any time, and anyone, that we can. Extending our hands to help others is part of what helps us grow in compassion. We are certainly aware of Jesus’ emphasis on that matter.

At the last Council meeting we discussed at length one particular humanitarian organization that has been intertwined with United over the last few years.

Many members and congregations have become increasingly engaged in the LifeNets organization, particularly due to the efforts of Victor Kubik, a fellow Council member. Many of LifeNets’ activities, and those of supporting congregations, have been reported in the various pages of United’s communications.

As a result, we sometimes receive inquiries or questions that indicate not everyone has a uniform understanding about LifeNets’ role and relationship to the United Church of God, *an International Association*. We want to make sure everyone is clear on a couple of these matters, and will address those momentarily. First, though, some background may be helpful and informative.

LifeNets began through the response of a small group of people, several of them United members, to the medical needs of the children who were victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in Ukraine. One doesn’t have to look very far to see people in need all over the world (indeed, one has to consciously turn a blind eye to avoid seeing them!), and other situations where people needed help quickly became apparent.

As word spread of the good accomplished by the Chernobyl project, other people who had resources, access to supplies and equipment, time to volunteer their expertise, etc., came forward to offer what they could, feeling compelled to do something about the problems they saw. A number of these were United Church of God members or other contacts Mr. Kubik knew. Various programs began to emerge, and Mr. Kubik has played an integral part in coordinating these efforts. As a result, LifeNets has evolved as an organization to the point that it received in 2002 over a half-million dollars worth of revenue or gifts-in-kind to distribute.

While LifeNets is not aimed entirely at benefiting Church members, many of its programs have greatly assisted UCG members around the globe, especially those in developing countries where governmental and other aid is not as available as it is in other parts of the world. In most cases, fellow UCG members were the driving force behind the projects, so LifeNets was actually a vehicle by which members were helping other members. We truly appreciate everyone’s heartfelt motivation to help, and Mr. Kubik’s capacity to implement some very practical solutions.

With that background, now there are two main areas of question that we wish to clarify.

First, LifeNets is not an official arm of the United Church of God. LifeNets is a separate legal entity that is not under the authority of UCG. It does not report to UCG nor does UCG control any of the specific activities of LifeNets.

The second area of question concerns whether members can or should send tithes to support LifeNets. We do not consider that sending money to help LifeNets in its humanitarian efforts, or any other aid organization, is the same as sending in assistance or tithes to the Church to help the needy in the Church. As Mr. Holladay wrote, the Church has a continual need to provide money for those in need of food, clothing and other basic necessities. These tithes and donations provide the means for filling the humanitarian needs within the Church that no other outside organization can fill, including LifeNets.

Therefore, we do not believe that sending tithes to LifeNets would be any more appropriate than sending tithes to other humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross, the cancer society, United Nations relief funds, etc. Donations of time, money or resources *should* be made to help the suffering, but the tithe is for the God-ordained use of the Church.

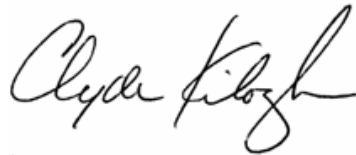
Perhaps we do not normally think of it this way, but the Church's assistance fund is truly a "humanitarian relief organization" as well, supported by your tithes and donations. Over the years the Church has distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars in aid, but because such assistance is usually done quietly and confidentially, it receives little publicity. You would be encouraged, though, to know of the many, many personal cases where brethren turned to the Church and were literally pulled immediately out of their stressful dilemmas—all made possible by the tithes and donations their fellow brethren had made.

Our view is that both the Church and independent organizations, particularly LifeNets, can continue to work together, each supplying what the other cannot do alone, so both can do what they can for those in need and thus fulfill the will of God.

We hope this answers some of the common questions about LifeNets. In closing, we can consider again Paul's words, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Please have a most peaceful and spiritually profitable Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Sincerely, on behalf of the Council of Elders,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clyde Kilough". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Clyde" being more prominent than the last name "Kilough".

Clyde Kilough
Chairman