

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter From the Chairman January 14, 2005

Dear Brethren,

The Feast of Pentecost is yet five months away, but I have been thinking a lot about an aspect of the meaning of that day in light of the death earlier this week of Mr. Dean Wilson. He and his wife, Marolyn, were a team that for 40 years had a profound influence overseeing the work of the Church in Canada and Australia, and serving several congregations in the United States. Under his leadership the operations in Canada and Australia grew and thrived, but not in numbers only. As a fellow Council member told me today, "There were times when I wished I could have served in Canada, because Dean Wilson had a wonderful reputation for being a developer of people." Another longtime friend assessed his life this way: "He was absolutely serious about everything in the Word of God, but he never took himself too seriously."

So, what is the connection with Pentecost? Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ established His Church through the giving of the Holy Spirit, promising that He would always keep that Church alive (Matthew 16:18). He has never ceased since to call people, inviting them to carry on the work of His Church. Some come and some go, but a core remains that is absolutely serious, like Dean Wilson, about living everything in the Word of God. It is in their lives and examples that we can see a major reason why the gates of hell will never prevail.

God tells us to consider the lives of His servants, for in them we can see encouraging evidence of how He will work in our lives. The "Faith Chapter" of Hebrews 11 is one such place, where Paul presents one example after another until he runs out of time to list all of them (verse 32). Some were key players in miraculous events, and some suffered incredible trials. Some are biblical legends, and some are "unknown soldiers" remembered nowhere by humans, but "whose names are in the Book of Life" (Philippians 4:3). How many names, we may wonder, has God added to that book since Paul wrote?

These examples are living proof of why Satan, who is as dedicated to the destruction of the Church as God is to its preservation, will never prevail. Members of the Body of Jesus Christ today share with all those who have gone before the same Spirit of God, and thus the same vision, faith and commitment. They share an identity with the apostle Paul that they are to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and that "no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:3-4). God has given them full confidence of winning this warfare, and they know they will see the prophesied day when "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down" (Revelation 12:10). Such faith leads to this: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (verse 11).

We call them "veterans," soldiers who have served their countries, and it is also a fitting description for many in God's Church. Dean Wilson was like many of you around the world who served your country, but then God called you to serve Him in His holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), in a battle for far more than anything physical and temporary this world can offer. It is for the treasure He offers—eternal life in His family, His coming Kingdom, His truth, His way of living. Our greatest battle will be when we accompany Jesus Christ at His return (Revelation 19:11-16), and "those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 17:14). Those who make up that army will be proven veterans.

When we look at the composition of His Church today, we see a lot of them. Sometimes we hear laments that we are an aging church, but we should consider that in that aging we find one of our strengths. It is a great advantage for a church to have a large number of converted, experienced veterans, "those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

In other words, they have lived a lot of life and fought a lot of battles as soldiers of Jesus Christ. They have had their share of successes and failures, have made good decisions and bad, have stumbled in sin and have sought His heart through righteous repentance. Through it all they have learned, overcome and remained dedicated to God. Virtually every congregation today has such a core of veterans who are stabilizing pillars in the Church. They are living examples of strength and courage. The veterans who have been through the trials of life are those who have the best credibility when they offer the words of encouragement and faith to others that, “this, too, shall pass.” The veterans are those who can sing, with more knowledge than anyone else, one of our favorite hymns, “God Will See Us Through.” It is these veterans whose lights often shine the brightest because of the fruits of God’s Spirit manifested in their lives.

God’s Church has a history of men and women who have demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit, not by flames of fire and speaking in tongues as on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, but by the way they have lived and fought the spiritual warfare. They have lived and fought with a willingness to die for what they believed in, a willingness to sacrifice themselves to become like the Captain of our salvation. Most have not been called on, like Him and others, to pay the ultimate price physically, but they have demonstrated such a willingness of heart by setting their minds on things above (Colossians 3:1-5).

It therefore may seem ironic, but one of the main reasons God’s Church never dies is precisely because His people are willing to! From the day we are baptized we covenant with Him that we will commit to the lifelong pursuit of holiness, and that means sacrificing our lives every day. And if true believers, those with such depth of conviction, are willing to give up themselves for His way of life, they will be effectively living for it.

A veteran church has much experience and maturity to draw on, especially when it comes to developing the next generation. For all of the younger and newer people in the Church today, I urge you to appreciate and get to know the many veterans in our midst. When my family began attending the Church of God in 1963, we were awed to know anyone who had been in the Church for 10 years—imagine, what a long time! Yet today many of you reading this have been converted for three, four, even five times that long. We have third, fourth and even fifth generation members today. God measures us by spiritual maturity, of course, and not by years of tenure, but for many of those veterans who have endured to this day, the years of experience have been very fruitful, and we as a church are better for it.

There are many like Dean and Marolyn Wilson among us today, converted veterans, and because of you we are richer and stronger. Even long after some are no longer physically able to be very active or influential, or even after they are physically gone, their examples continue to be remembered and thus continue to teach, as Hebrews 11 points out.

We would all do well to carefully observe and learn how these veterans wear the armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-18), appropriately honor them while they live, and follow in their footsteps when they are gone. It is all a part of how God the Father and Jesus Christ are leading and preserving the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s keep one another in our prayers and stay focused on our job of preaching the gospel and being prepared as a people—there is nothing greater that we can be involved in than the calling to which God has delivered us. As the saying goes, “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!”

Sincerely, and with warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clyde Kilough". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Clyde Kilough