

August 19, 2005

Greetings Fellow Elders,

Next Thursday will begin the August Council session and we wanted to get the agenda to you before the weekend. Starting this session I am proposing a few changes in the way we conduct our meetings. This session will be a pilot and if the Council approves, these changes will become permanent. Below are excerpts from a letter to the Council proposing and further explaining these changes. I thought I would share it with you as a way of giving a fuller description.

(Excerpt from the letter to the Council)

Our tenth anniversary year has been one of change and progress and with your approval I would like to see a series of progressive changes take place in our Council work. There are three major shifts I would like to propose to the Council and we have included them in planning for and creating the August agenda. If they meet with your approval in this experimental round, I would like to see them become our standard practice. Let me describe them in some detail:

President's Unified Report:

During the last ten years our agendas have included separate reports from the President and each operation manager. I would like, beginning with the August meeting, to change the nature of the reports from the Home Office staff.

You will notice on the agenda that there is simply a president's report. Each operation manager's report is a subset of the president's report. I have asked the President to coordinate the operation manager's reports into one unit. It makes more sense to have the Home Office administration come to us as a unit under the direction of the President rather than as separate entities.

Following a suggestion from Tony Wasilkoff I have also asked the President to include a report from Larry Darden informing the Council of any legal issues of importance as a regular part of our meetings.

The Nature of the Reports:

I have also discussed with the President our need to change the dynamics of reports to the Council. Is there anyone on the Council who has not zoned out while portions of the reports are being read? Why? Very few of us want to hear someone describe statistics we have on paper in front of us. We can all read faster and more selectively than they can speak. A governing body is energized by the ability to engage administrators in discussion of important issues and put to sleep by listening to pages of statistics.

In order to change this situation, we need the full reports in advance—preferably two weeks in advance. We need time to study and digest the reports. We may find a report complete, understandable and acceptable—no issues, no questions. Conversely, a report may not be fully clear and it may raise questions.

The next step is a significant change and it will take a little time to get used to it. In the case of an operation manager, rather than give a verbal report before the Council (which is usually a rehash of what we have on paper) the floor is opened for the council members to engage the operation manager in discussion of any issues relative to his report. It is possible that there is nothing to discuss, hence his “report” consists completely of the paper report sent in advance. I understand this is a portion that will seem strange at first, but why take up time listening to something which is perfectly clear and about which we have no questions?

On the other hand there may be several questions which will allow for constructive dialogue between Council and administration. This is really the heart of good governance. We need to talk with our administrators about the health and direction of the organization. It is obvious that this segment can no longer be timed with complete accuracy, and I will work around that fact.

Operation Plan Based Reporting

The last item is the most significant and as you will see is closely linked to doing the above points successfully.

The annual Operation Plan is intended to be a road map for the coming year. It tells the GCE and the COE exactly what will be accomplished during the upcoming fiscal year. In actual fact, we cannot begin the fiscal year without an Operation Plan approved by the GCE. In reality I suspect that most GCE members, and possibly even some of us, file the Operation Plan away after it has been reviewed and passed by the GCE.

It should be our Council “bible”. How can you measure success or failure without a yardstick? The only tool that is supposed to be specifically designed for measuring achievement is the Operation Plan.

The most significant change I am proposing is that each of us comes to each meeting with our Operation Plan and that we use it as an assessment tool. I have asked the President to gear all the reports from the Home Office to telling us what has been accomplished so far this fiscal year by each operation in the fulfillment of the Operation Plan. Obviously we also *want* to know the long range plans of the Home Office, but we *need* to know how we are doing in fulfilling our promises to the GCE for the fiscal year.

I believe there is a need to review the structure of the Operation Plan before the next fiscal year and seek ways to make it a better assessment tool. The best tools are concrete rather than abstract and setting goals that are measurable. It is understandable, for instance, that the annual budget lends itself best to this manner of planning while some areas of Ministerial Services are most difficult to assess in this manner. Regardless of the differences, we are best served by a good Operation Plan which is regularly used by the Council and administration in the performance of their work.

Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this letter, I have asked the President to take these issues into account in preparing the reports from the Home Office. Based upon how this trial run goes I will

be asking for your approval of this new approach with whatever modifications you feel need to be made to make it most effective.

(End of excerpt)

As you can see from the letter to the Council, this session will provide an opportunity to assess a different approach. We will let you know through the Council Report how it goes. One last thing, you will notice that the agenda for this session is not broken out into days. I would like the Council at the beginning of the meeting to assign a priority to the business items so that the most important business is given the highest priority. It is always easy to put the urgent first, but often the urgent isn't the most important.

Please keep us in your prayers as the meeting approaches that God will guide our efforts to serve Him.

On Behalf of the Council,

Robert Dick