

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
December 12, 2005 – Cincinnati, OH

Robert Dick called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m., launching the Council into a busy and productive day. In the morning, topics ranged from an edit of the Media Philosophy statement, to a report from Clyde Kilough on his recent trip to New Zealand and Australia and the opening round of what will likely be an ongoing discussion on the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the Council of Elders, the president and National Councils. During the afternoon, the Council deliberated its support of amendments proposed to be on the ballot at the 2006 General Conference of Elders and discussed the procedure for determining, for the sake of balloting on Council members, *whether* an elder's primary job is international. The final 2½ hours of the afternoon were spent in executive session.

Edit of Media Philosophy Statement

Victor Kubik, chairman of the Media and Communications Committee, presented the Council with proposed edits to the "Media Philosophy of the United Church of God" that emphasize our belief that God has drawn us into a relationship with, and made us followers of, Jesus Christ. By resolution the Council agreed unanimously to rescind the previous version and replace it with following Media Philosophy statement:

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God is a divine commission given to the Church. The Bible, from the prophets to Jesus Christ and the apostles, establishes clear principles of how to present the gospel most effectively. These principles still apply.

The gospel message, which includes God's offer of the gift of salvation, shows His love for humanity. We must reflect that same love in the way we deliver His gospel to the world. We seek to provide the world with the message of hope for salvation, to help those who believe and repent, and to warn all of the consequences of sin.

We must speak and write in a way that challenges our audience's beliefs in a manner that is simple to understand, engaging, convincing and compelling. We must tailor the message to fit different cultural, national, religious and linguistic groups.

In a spiritually-blind world, the deep truths of God are most effectively presented in a manner that leads from "milk" to "meat." For that reason, we must present the truth of God in a way that does not overwhelm people in either content or quantity.

The message is more important than those who deliver it. Consequently, we believe in focusing attention on the message of truth rather than on those who sponsor it. Furthermore, we believe in delivering the gospel primarily in the public arena rather than inviting people into the Church to receive it.

We believe we are required to freely give the truth to the world. Therefore, we offer our materials without charge or obligation.

We understand this is not the only day of salvation and that God alone can draw someone to Christ, which means we are not responsible for converting the world.

Nevertheless, we are still compelled by our mission to preach the gospel with urgency to all the world and care for those whom God calls.

We are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God and followers of Jesus Christ. As ambassadors, our message must transcend the ideologies, politics and religions of this world.

President's Trip to New Zealand and Australia

Clyde Kilough gave the Council a report on his recent trip, during which he and his wife, Dee, spent five days visiting and reviewing the work of the Church in New Zealand and eight days in Australia. Mr. Kilough commented that they were warmly received and that it was a valuable opportunity to be able to meet face-to-face with the elders and wives in both areas.

Jeff and Lisa Caudle serve in New Zealand, where Mr. Caudle is the pastor and office manager. There are some 115 brethren scattered throughout the nation. Auckland, with a congregation of about 50, has an international flavor, with attendees from Tonga, Fiji, South Africa, Zimbabwe, England and India. The Church's annual income has been stable, with an average increase of about 15 percent over the last five years. There are 1,600 to 1,700 *Good News* subscribers in the country.

Mr. Caudle also spends a total of about two months each year traveling through Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, visiting and supporting the 35 to 40 members in those areas. There are 531 *Good News* subscribers in Singapore. A lack of manpower is the greatest challenge for the work that is being done in the region. Mr. Kilough is planning a meeting at the home office in January to discuss plans for the future with Joel Meeker, Mr. Caudle and Dave Baker (who also works in the Philippines and with other Asian nations).

While in Australia, Mr. Kilough sat in on Australia's Pastoral Committee meeting, annual National Council meeting and the first ministerial conference in six years that included all of Australia's elders. The Church in Australia is also dealing with the challenge of a shortage of manpower.

The Church's income in Australia is stable, with an anticipated growth of 9 percent this year. Cash reserve goals have been met and are being maintained. The *Good News* subscription list in Australia stands at about 21,500.

In both New Zealand and Australia, care must be taken to control the number receiving *The Good News* in order to have resources to support the subscribers. Readers are encouraged to make use of the Web site to read and study online.

Throughout the meetings and discussions, Church leaders in both New Zealand and Australia emphasized their desire to support UCGIA, the home office and Council of Elders. Suggestions were considered that would help the U.S. home office continue to work more effectively and cooperatively with ongoing efforts in both regions.

Role of the President in International Areas

Mr. Dick introduced a topic that will require a great deal of discussion. The dialogue started with the initial question: "What is the role of the president in international areas of the Church?" During meetings in August 2005 Mr. Kilough asked the Council to clarify his role.

Leon Walker gained approval of the Council to discuss the matter with elders in international areas. He sent a letter and survey to all of the international elders shortly before the 2005 Feast of Tabernacles. Mr. Dick provided the Council with a four-page summary of discussions on this topic between Council members during agenda planning.

Mr. Walker began by stating that the responses to the survey went in a different direction than was anticipated and opened up even more fundamental issues for discussion. Mr. Walker wrote in an e-mail communication to Mr. Dick that confusion, "...in the international areas regarding the role of the president internationally is to some extent... due to a lack of clarity with respect to how the Council and president should function."

There is need for a better understanding of the roles of the Council of Elders, the Church president and the National Councils and how they function together. Mr. Walker acknowledged that this issue has been discussed several times but never fully resolved. He proposed that starting by defining the role of the president would be "putting the cart before the horse" and that it would be better first to define foundational concepts. Then, he said, defining the president's role will be much easier.

Mr. Walker asked the Council to consider some questions about those foundational concepts. What is the United Church of God? Are we merely an association of independent entities around the world with no overall global central administration? Are we just tied together by certain doctrines or policies, but not by a common administration? Each National Council has its own bylaws due to legal requirements in its respective country. But does the United Church of God transcend national boundaries and legal documents? Are National Councils the supreme administrative authority for each area? Or do they recognize an authority over them? If so, is that authority the Council of Elders? Mr. Walker pointed out that we have a common vocabulary, but often don't have common definitions for our words. For example, what is the meaning of "governance," "administration," "association," "micro-management," etc.?

Mr. Walker emphasized that the purpose of the discussion today is to begin talking about the subject and then determine what steps should be taken. He pointed out that the Church is in a position now to resolve issues that we could not 10 years ago. He acknowledged that there is much work to be done on these questions and that it might take as long as a year to come to final resolutions.

A brainstorming session continued for more than an hour, during which many more specific questions were raised. The tone of the session was positive and contemplative, as the Council reviewed previous discussions, conclusions, Church documents and unresolved issues. Members agreed that as the unified, spiritual Body of Christ, the Church exists across national boundaries and is not limited by national laws and regulations that define churches in their countries.

Several of the Council members cited sections of the Rules of Association, Constitution and Council-generated documents that seek to identify roles and relationships throughout the Church. For example, Richard Thompson read from page 1 of the Rules of Association, which states that the Council of Elders is the primary body with oversight over the entire Church. Mr. Walker pointed out that National Councils acknowledge that governance authority – the question is more about the administration of the governance. Another question is, "Do National Councils have any administrative line of authority above them in the structure of the Church?"

Jim Franks, who served on the Church's original Transitional Board of Directors and subsequently several years on the Council of Elders, recalled early discussions about deciding on a name for the Church. The phrase "an International Association" was included with the intent of focusing on the international nature of the organization. He acknowledged that the word "association" was not clearly defined. But the expectation was that international areas would willingly cooperate with selected leaders – the intent was not that the Church would consist of independent, loosely associated bodies.

Victor Kubik, who since 1995 has served on the Transitional Board of Directors and the Council of Elders, agreed. He said it was never intended that the Church would be made up of independent bodies. He pointed out that now, for example, all ordinations (in the United States and international areas) must be approved by the Council of Elders. The Council is also the body through which conflicts within the Church are resolved, and it is responsible for maintaining doctrinal unity within the Church. National Councils comply with organizational laws within their nations, but it was never the intent that those portions of the Church would exist independently.

Mr. Dick, another Council member who has served on the Transitional Board of Directors and Council of Elders since May 1995, recalled a defining moment at the beginning of United. When names were considered, it was a deliberate and focused decision to choose the name "United *Church* of God," not "United *Churches* of God." Mr. Dick stated that in a clearly focused dialogue the word "churches" was rejected because, "...we wanted no inference that we were disconnected bodies, part of an association in that sense. We were a Church, singular, residing in different parts of the world."

Mr. Kilough commented that to understand how we should function together, we have to first of all view ourselves in light of the ideal of God's Kingdom and then work back from there to the way we operate today. He noted that Paul, who worked with widely diverse congregations, constantly emphasized unity. He stressed that, likewise, we should be more than just a Church that functions across national boundaries – in the spiritual sense, we should be a Church without national boundaries.

Tony Wasilkoff stated that the fear some international areas have, based on history and experience, is that the "strong arm of headquarters" will try to take control. He said it's important to coordinate with international areas, not to control them. He commented that the Rules of Association are designed to further good relationships and effectively facilitate the work of the Church. What's sometimes missing is how to do what we intend.

Several emphasized that the president's responsibilities are outlined in a statement issued by the Council in September 1999 titled "Roles and Responsibilities of the President." This document defines the president as the one who can best help to administer the Council's decisions. Mr. Walker acknowledged that the document is a good starting point, and that while the Council passed it by resolution, there was no input from international areas.

Mr. Dick pointed out that elders in the United States also have questions about the roles of both the Council and the president. There are fundamental questions about what leadership is, what authority is and who has it. Mr. Walker agreed, pointing out that some erroneously believe that the president is superior to the Council.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was decided that Mr. Walker will prepare a resolution to assign the next steps in the process of dealing with these issues to the Ethics, Roles and Rules Committee of the Council.

Proposed Amendments

Mr. Dick introduced Mr. Meeker, chairman of the Ethics, Roles and Rules Committee. As part of the amendment process, the Council is required each year to indicate whether it supports proposed amendments to the organizational documents. As the Council considered the two proposed amendments filed this year, there are three options:

- If the proposed amendment receives support from four or more Council members, it will be placed on the ballot for consideration at the 2006 GCE annual meeting.
- If a proposed amendment does not receive support from four or more Council members, it will be returned to the Amendment Committee, which will send the proposed amendment to the GCE. If it receives support from 25 percent or more of the GCE, the amendment will be placed on the ballot to be voted on at the annual meeting.
- If a proposed amendment does not receive support from four or more Council members, the Council by a simple majority may choose to write a Statement of Concern to express the Council's thoughts on the proposed amendment.

The first amendment considered was to the Rules of Association, Rule 4-140 "Position of Home Office and Management Team." The proposed amendment seeks to add a paragraph expressing the authority of the president to develop, manage and maintain the relationship between UCGIA and National Councils. In discussing the proposed amendment, the Council agreed, while it is not opposed to the intent of the proposed amendment, it would not substantially clarify or add to the president's job description nor would it facilitate his efforts in performing his duties – and could even complicate the situation. The proposed amendment did not gain support of the minimum of four Council members, so it will be returned to the Amendment Committee for determination of support by the GCE. By simple majority the Council requested that the ERR committee produce a Statement of Concern.

The second amendment considered was to the following paragraphs in the Bylaws: 7.9.2, 7.9.2.1, 12.2.2.10 and 12.2.2.12. The intent of the proposed amendment is to lower the threshold of support required from the GCE in order to place a proposed amendment that the Council of Elders did not support on the ballot.

In discussion, Council members voiced two areas of disagreement with the proposed amendment. Philosophically, the majority of the ERR committee felt, and other Council members agreed, that for the sake of stability, the threshold for placing a proposed amendment on the ballot should not be too low. Council members also expressed that since the ballot in question can only be cast in support of placing a proposed amendment on the GCE annual meeting ballot, not casting a ballot does not necessarily indicate indifference – it may be a considered opinion that the elder does not wish for the measure to be on the GCE ballot. Therefore the number of "votes cast" may be more than the number of ballots that are returned. There was also a technical objection. Bylaw 7.9.2.1 deals with items placed on an agenda, not with proposed amendments.

Aaron Dean stated that, while he is in favor of a high threshold for changes to our documents, he was supportive of the amendment. He pointed out that the only proposed

amendment not supported by the Council that eventually was placed on the annual GCE ballot garnered a “Yes” vote that indicated a high level of support. His point was that some elders vote in favor of a proposed amendment even if they did not vote for it to be placed on the ballot. He was also concerned about rejecting the proposed amendment based on a technicality without first finding out if the writers had been directed by the Amendment Committee to include paragraph 7.9.2.1 as part of their proposal.

After discussion, the proposed amendment did not gain support of the minimum of four Council members, so it will be returned to the Amendment Committee for determination of support by the GCE. By simple majority the Council asked the ERR committee to write a Statement of Concern.

Turning to another matter, Amendment Committee member Ed Smith’s term has expired. By resolution the Council unanimously agreed to select Mr. Smith to serve another term on the committee.

The final item of business in open session was a discussion of Bylaw 8.3.1, which states that an elder who serves as an international representative on the Council of Elders must do his “primary work outside the United States.” The question placed before the Council was, “Who will decide whether an elder’s primary work is outside the United States?”

Mr. Kilough felt that there needs to be specific standards to make the determination. For example, would “primary” be judged by the number of hours spent working internationally? Or by the importance of his international responsibilities? Or by the amount of time spent out of the country?

Speaking on behalf of the ERR committee, Mr. Meeker acknowledged that while some of the matters to be considered are objective, the ERR committee felt it was not possible to determine a specific list of criteria that would fit every situation. He also expressed that it would be an extremely rare circumstance that did not warrant a drawn out and complicated effort to establish such a list of criteria.

Mr. Meeker proposed a resolution that “petitions for inclusion on the list of ‘international elders’ made by elders residing in the United States shall be directed to the president, who, after consultation with Ministerial Services, shall make a recommendation concerning the petition to the Council of Elders for its decision.” The resolution was passed unanimously.

The Council spent the final two hours of the afternoon in executive session and completed its work for the day at 4:55 p.m.

Don Henson

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