

United Church of God, *an International Association*
General Conference of Elders Meeting Report
May 7-8, 2006 – Cincinnati, OH

Chairman Bob Dick called the General Conference of Elders Annual Meeting to order shortly after 9 a.m. on May 7. He called on Larry Neff, regional pastor and Denver, Loveland and Colorado Springs, Colorado, pastor, to open with prayer.

The theme of this year's conference is "Service and Leadership—Today, Tomorrow and Beyond." Mr. Dick said that the welcome receptions and Sabbath services had started the weekend well. In light of the conference he recalled Mrs. Loma Armstrong's favorite scripture, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity..."

Introduction of New Elders

Then Mr. Dick introduced the new elders ordained or credentialed in the last year. Last year there were 11 new elders introduced; this year there are 19.

- Oludare and "Ton" Akinbo
- Bart and Joan Bornhorst
- Dempsey and Susan Bruton
- Paul and Merlen Cebrian
- Gladstone and Alice Chonde
- Ken and Jean Cline
- Jim and Marlene Cowell
- Russell and Tammy DeVilbiss
- Martin and Denise Fekete
- Don and Jackie Finger
- Alberto González Peña and Yulun Langarica Verdin
- Tim and Mary Heine
- Dennis and Paula Horlick
- Morgen and Joleen Kriedemann
- Leroy and Maxine Neff
- Geoff and Judy Nelson
- Jonathan and Deborah Pinelli
- David and Jolinda Schreiber
- David and Sarah Witt

Balloting and Results

Mr. Dick then conducted the balloting for the four members of the Council of Elders and the ratification of the Strategic Plan, Operation Plan and the budget. Later in the day Secretary Gerald Seelig announced that all three documents had been ratified:

- The Strategic Plan passed with 305 yes to 23 no.
- The Operation Plan passed 302 yes to 26 no.
- The budget passed 290 yes to 38 no.

The Council members chosen were announced Monday morning:

- Robert Dick
- Bill Eddington (international)
- Richard Pinelli
- Richard Thompson

Zeal Revisited

After the balloting Mr. Dick introduced Clyde Kilough for the keynote address, “Zeal Revisited: Service and Leadership Through the Eyes of Paul.”

Mr. Kilough began with the example he used last year of Christ driving out the moneychangers in John 2. Christ’s zeal for His Father’s house had not faded later when He again drove out the moneychangers in Mark 11.

Christ loves His temple today, the Church. Mr. Kilough said he believes Christ looks down on the Church today and sees a people who are zealous in wanting to serve and lead like Him. This year’s theme of service and leadership was chosen because it reflects this desire to grow even more in these areas.

We have built a foundation of this study in previous years, but in addition to Christ’s example, there are other examples we can examine, such as Paul, who said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

Acts 20 gives the powerful story of Paul addressing the elders in Ephesus. Paul reminded them of his example—that he had served the Lord with all humility. It’s hard to say you are humble without showing vanity, but Mr. Kilough pointed out that Paul truly had hard-earned humility. He had gone through beatings, stonings, shipwreck, hunger, as well as his deep care of the churches (2 Corinthians 11). Also, he faced a thorn in the flesh. Paul was practicing what the book *Good to Great* said was a top level of leadership—to have great ambition for the institution, not for himself.

Paul’s conversion went to his heart, cut him deeply, moved him. He taught with feeling and invested himself in His care for the brethren.

Mr. Kilough said one of the simplest ways to have zeal is to be around those who have zeal. He advised avoiding regular contact with zeal killers. An effective ministry will be one that spreads zeal to those around.

In Acts 20:22 Paul said he was going to Jerusalem “bound in the Spirit,” even though it meant facing further trials. Mr. Kilough encouraged the elders to ask, “What am I bound to?” Psalm 118:26 mentions the sacrifice being bound by cords to the horns of the altar. We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Paul considered that he was a drink offering being poured out. The human heart is restless, so it needs to be bound to God’s work. The cords are the vows we made at baptism, the calling God gave us and the love for the brethren.

Paul found that there is a joy that comes in this sacrificial fulfillment of ministerial duty. He taught the Ephesians the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:24, 27).

Mr. Kilough encouraged the elders to remember how Jesus' teaching affected the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They said, "Did not our heart burn within us?" (Luke 24:32). It takes a sacrificial spirit to dig deeper into the Word of God to open the Scriptures to reach the heart.

Mr. Kilough said every person in the Church is valuable to God. Paul told the Ephesian elders to "take heed." We have to be on guard. The ministry faces all the temptations common to man plus more, from flattery to weariness in well-doing. Paul gave warnings with tears about external and internal dangers. It takes discernment to guard the flock, to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

We all need a heart of sacrifice and giving as Paul displayed. Paul prayed with the Ephesian elders before saying his final farewell, then they all wept freely.

We have also had a rugged path these last 15 years. Mr. Kilough encouraged the elders to follow and lead down the narrow path that says love, duty, honor, sacrifice. This type of leadership cuts through the fog of sin and temptation with a zeal that is steady and ingrained.

International Reports: Australia

Australian National Council Chairman Bill Eddington led off the five international reports scheduled for this year. Each international area is currently scheduled for a presentation every three years.

He gave some demographic facts about Australia, including that 92 percent of the population is Caucasian and 7 percent Asian, and that there is 100 percent literacy in the country. Professing Christians have declined to just 67.4 percent of the population, with unspecified religions making up 28 percent.

Australia is just south of Indonesia, one of the largest Muslim nations in the world, and by accepting refugees from rebel areas of Indonesia, Australia risks angering Indonesia.

The United Church of God in Australia also serves the country of Papua New Guinea, where the median age is only 21.2 years, there are many ethnic groups and only 1 to 2 percent have English as their first language. So there are many challenges in spreading the gospel there.

The ministry in Australia is spread thin, covering many congregations each. Attendance at the Feast was 621; 544 is the average weekly attendance. There were 19 baptisms last year and the *Good News* circulation is 20,800, of which 18,550 are subscribers. *World News and Prophecy* circulation is 1,998, which has a major impact on the mailing budget since it comes out every month. There are also about 800 *Bible Study Course* graduates in Australia.

The Church in Australia uses volunteers extensively in spreading the gospel and is using the Web a great deal as well. Sadly, their webmaster has just contracted hepatitis. The Church in Australia also produces the *United News Australia* publication.

Eastern Europe

Victor Kubik, Council member and Lafayette and Terre Haute, Indiana, pastor, gave the report on the Church's work in Eastern Europe, an area that has undergone drastic changes in recent years. These countries have gone from being under Communist domination to being free, and some countries have even become part of the European Union. For example, Estonia is the third-fastest growing economy in the world. There are 350 million people in the Eastern European area.

Johnnie and Hazel Lambert have been instrumental in serving in the Baltic republics. He is an elder in New York, a modest man who often travels to the area at his own expense and who helps coordinate the translation, printing and mailing of Church literature in the Estonian and Russian languages. He has kept the Feast there since 1997. Also most Sabbath mornings at 6 a.m. he uses Skype Internet telephone service to reach Estonia at 1 p.m. their time with a Sabbath service.

We also have an elder, Henrikas Klovas, who lives in Lithuania and who helps serve the area.

A number of volunteers are involved in translating and producing literature in the various Eastern European languages. Now the *Bible Study Course* is being printed in the Russian language by Ukrainian Sabbatarians at a significant saving (30 cents each versus \$2.25 for laser printing). A number of booklets are available as well, and these can be found on the Web at ucg.org/easteuropean/. Literature is available in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and soon in Swedish.

Mr. Kubik also mentioned that he had been working with Sabbath keepers in Ukraine since 1990. About 10,000 Sabbatarians are in the area around Ukraine. He talked about the resettling of a group of Sabbatarians from a dangerous situation in Tajikistan to Ukraine in 1997. These people have adopted the Holy Days (which many Sabbatarians don't). He mentioned that the LifeNets charity he founded is helping with street children and other projects in Ukraine. He also said there is a lot of interest in the Church from the nation of Romania.

Nigeria

Mark Mickelson, pastor of the Kennewick and Spokane, Washington/Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, congregations, reported on the work of the Church in Nigeria, where he assists senior pastor Fred Kellers.

Mr. Mickelson explained that the northern part of Nigeria is Muslim, while the southern part is mainly Christian. Violence between those groups flared up earlier this year, and Jim Franks on his recent trip traveled right through the area where fighting had occurred. There are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, and the median age is under 19—42 percent are under 15. The Church in Nigeria will be having a youth camp for the first time this summer. There are congregations in Lagos, Benin City and Owerri.

Even police at roadblocks trying to get his money were generally very positive about ministers and would ask him to pray for them. He said he obliged, praying that they would stop being corrupt and taking advantage of other people! In the Nigerian culture,

political leaders lord it over the people and husbands often lord it over their families. To teach the leaders to be kind and caring is challenging.

The Church has provided seminars in Nigeria almost every year. We have also given a seminar to the Church of God–Nigeria and have a continuing relationship with them.

Our brethren in Nigeria face economic hardships and health problems. When you stand up for the truth in Nigeria, you can be risking your home and your health. One family was denied access to the community well, and was forced to move. Without a source of good water, their children became ill and required medical care.

Mini-banks have been established with donations from the United States to help members start businesses.

Mr. Mickelson said because the people are receptive to religion and English is widely spoken, the opportunity to preach the gospel there is wide open. There are 6,500 *GN* subscribers. Our recently ordained elder there, Dare Akinbo, started a Web site, which—with no advertising—received 800 hits in the first month.

Southern Africa

Bill Jahns, who pastors the congregations in Malawi and in Johannesburg, South Africa, presented the report on Southern Africa this year.

In South Africa, there are four churches with 204 in attendance. In Zambia there are two churches, and attendance is 160. In Malawi, there are two churches with 95 in attendance. In Zimbabwe, attendance is about 20.

Mr. Jahns showed photos of the congregations with commentary about the difficulties faced in various areas. He pointed out that Johannesburg has been called the crime capital of the world. He described the bad roads in Zambia and what a toll they had taken on elder Kambani Banda's car. He explained how the government of another country had been taking farms away from those of another ethnic group. The brethren in Malawi had recently suffered a severe drought, especially in the southern part of the country. A Church member who is a nurse, age 76, was infected with HIV while trying to give a shot to someone else. The brethren in the region have been very thankful for various Good Works Program projects that have helped in various ways.

Neil and Erline Becker run the office in East London, South Africa. There are 11,740 *GN* subscribers. Also, there has been an exciting 55 percent increase in donations from readers!

Mr. Jahns also mentioned that the brethren in South Africa encourage visitors to come to the Feast there. The modern infrastructure, pleasant accommodations and natural beauty make it an enjoyable place to keep the Feast.

Spanish Region

Leon Walker gave an overview of the Spanish-speaking areas, which includes 43 congregations, plus 23 audio or video groups (including one in United States). The Spanish region includes 16 countries and is served by 20 ministers, 12 of whom are

employed by the Church. Many of the congregations are large ones, including Santiago, Chile, which has 314 in attendance. There are now 1,169 members in the Spanish region, with an attendance of 2,393—more than a 35 percent increase since 1996.

Circulation of the Spanish *Good News* is now about 20,000 and will increase to 22,000 next year.

They now have a central Web page in the Spanish area that looks like the main UCG Web page, but in Spanish. They are in the process of producing local Web pages for different countries, including Feast site information, camp information, etc.

Half of the members in the southern area of South America live in Santiago, but how do we serve the scattered members without a resident pastor? We have a live cybercast of services from Santiago, and there is also a webcast from Mexico.

Another development is that about 100 members have returned to the Church recently. Mr. Walker told two stories about members who remained faithful to the truth, but didn't know anyone else was still keeping the Holy Days, etc. When they found out about United, they were very happy.

Tribute to the Deceased Elders and Wives

Ken Giese led a tribute to 11 elders and wives, with photos, tributes from family and friends and a printed brochure. Those remembered were:

- Anne Burchard
- Elmer Conley
- Jo Ann Dennis
- Mildred Prettyman
- John Robinson
- Irene Schnippert
- Marge Seiver
- Onnie Thompson
- Harold Treybig
- Jack Yeager
- Vyonne Young

Address From the President

Mr. Kilough said that God has blessed us immensely over the years. The Church is in a stable condition, ready to reach the world. The financial condition is encouraging. Ministerial Services is going through a restructuring that will bear good fruit. Media is growing.

In the areas that needed to be restructured, he explained it was best to do it now before those areas become a crisis. People have been wearing too many hats, so we have tried to take some off. Because of the manpower challenge, Richard Pinelli was asked to focus on training the trainers of future ministers. Because of the importance of education and the need for coordination to avoid duplication of effort, Dave Register was asked to coordinate that area.

Mr. Kilough said our focus in the coming year will be on the media area. He explained that in United teams have done our best work, and in a multitude of counselors there is safety. So a media think tank or steering committee of four or five people, in addition to Mr. Kilough and Peter Eddington, will be formed. This group will be evaluating where we are and asking questions like, Is it working? What new ideas can we try? He said the names of those to serve on this team will be announced a little later.

Mr. Kilough reminded everyone that we are all here because of the labors of those who have gone before us, and so we have a responsibility to those who will come after us.

Address From the Treasurer

Tom Kirkpatrick was happy to report that we are nearing the end of another year of God's blessing, where the income appears it will be above the \$20.3 million budgeted amount. He thanked God and the members for their faithful support. He said the income has increased nicely, especially in the last couple of months, but we must still continue to manage the finances conservatively.

He explained the background principles for the budgeting process. First, provide funding for the operational imperatives of the Church: preaching the gospel and preparing a people. Then live within a balanced budget and address long-term challenges and needs.

He said the Church is sitting on a demographic time bomb. We face retirement and health-care costs for an aging workforce, legacy costs that have been inadequately planned for. We have an aging donor base. And we need to replace ministers. He mentioned a history of periodic instability and crisis in the Church, and a history of often making pleas to members for more money, leading some members to wonder why the Church can't live within its budget.

Only this year have we reached the goal of a minimum of 10 weeks in cash reserves before the Fall Holy Days. A strong foundation has been poured and is hardened, Dr. Kirkpatrick said, and we need to keep people with jackhammers away from it. He said he recognizes that a few million dollars in reserve seems like a lot. He asked, Could having some money in the bank tempt us to be Laodicean and to let down in zeal? It could, but shame on us if we do, he said.

Address From the Ministerial Services Operation Manager

Jim Franks reported that there are now 89 full-time U.S. pastors and 10 other employees in the Ministerial Services area. There are 214 congregations in the United States and about 400 congregations around the world. The average age of U.S. pastors is 58.3 years. The oldest pastor is age 80, and Gary Black is the youngest at age 40.

Mr. Franks explained that the Church plans to hire more ministers. We have full-time pastors assigned to all congregations now, but we must be looking ahead for more. We are unabashedly saying we are looking for younger men. It is a great career, he said.

Mr. Franks also reported on some of the changes in Ministerial Services. He mentioned Dave and Becky Johnson's and Dave and Linda Register's moves to Cincinnati. He discussed working with the senior pastors in three areas of Africa and with

Dave Baker in Asia. He also mentioned the Ministerial Development Program conferences that will be held in all U.S. regions, as well as in Canada, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and Latin America.

Address From the Media and Communications Services Operation Manager

Peter Eddington thanked media employees and the elders who serve as editors and writers for Church publications. He mentioned that his focus in this report would be on the use of the Internet in preaching the gospel. The Internet is becoming the major mass media. Penetration has hit an all-time high in the United States, and 42 percent now have broadband connections!

Mr. Eddington gave a number of *Beyond Today* statistics showing the rapid growth of visitors to the *Beyond Today* Web site as well as the number of people responding to the program (see the May *United News* for details). He also showed several video clips from *Beyond Today*.

He also mentioned some of the cutting-edge methods of getting the message out. For example, so far Google has 16 *Beyond Today* programs posted for free, and many searchers are downloading it from their site. Also, Apple's iTunes browser has *Beyond Today* programs available, and users can "subscribe" to receive future programs there.

Mr. Eddington mentioned that plans are to make the programs available to international areas as well. We will keep on putting the program on cable-access TV as well as the Internet.

Mr. Eddington also mentioned that TV didn't kill radio. Actually now there are more choices than ever. Satellite radio, Internet radio and podcasts—we're using all three. Also, we're still using broadcast radio as well. Now 52 million people are listening to Internet radio. Also the active podcast audience is now 3 million, but is expected to reach 15 million by 2010.

Mr. Eddington also mentioned the use of keyword advertising on the Internet. For example, there were 6.62 million impressions of our Easter-related keywords on Google and Yahoo in April. From those who clicked on our ads, 1,484 new subscribers to *The Good News* were added.

Also, there has been a 278 percent increase in visits to our gnmagazine.org Web site in the last year.

Mr. Eddington said we aim to allocate an even greater percentage to Internet advertising, while maintaining a strong print advertising program. He mentioned the growth in the number of coworkers and donors, and he asked for prayers that this trend will continue.

He said it's nice to see us being quoted by others. For example, the History Channel contacted us to talk to Mario Seiglie about the Exodus. The Caribbean Examination Council wanted to use our material on teen sex and a PR firm in New York wanted to offer guests to appear on *Beyond Today*.

Although the *GN* print runs have been level, there has been a 4 percent increase in U.S. subscribers.

Because of the strong income, Media and Communications was just given approval to take out additional advertising (print and Internet, including outside the United States). Mr. Eddington said we believe the seeds we are sowing will bear fruit. Please continue to pray for the Church's media efforts.

Address From the Chairman

Mr. Dick rehearsed the themes from the letters he sent out before the last three Council meetings, addressing the approach and direction of the Council.

His Aug. 19, 2005, letter talked about beginning a unified report from the president, along with his team, rather than individual reports. Second, the Council asked for written reports in advance, and then used the time during the Council meetings to ask questions and discuss the material. Third, he addressed using the Operation Plan as a basis for outcomes-based reporting. This year's plan is a step forward, but still more metrics are needed in future plans. One of the outcomes of these steps was to streamline the Council meetings, lopping off a day.

Mr. Dick mentioned that the president had asked the Council to tell him how they want him to relate to the international areas. This raised the bigger question of the roles of the Council and the administration, which the Council is continuing to explore.

Mr. Dick said we are a fruit-based organization. We must promote growth. He said he found it exciting to see the growth in the donor and coworker numbers. Where your money is, your heart will be also, so he sees these people making a further commitment in the future.

So what does it mean that the Council is to govern? James 3:4 uses the term "governor"—his role in this verse is to steer. The Council is to steer, to convey the vision. The Council wants the president to preside.

Mr. Dick said the challenges for the future include: How to preach the gospel today. How to retain the young people in the Church. How to prepare the next generation of leaders. How to care for those employees who have given their lives to the Church and are reaching retirement.

After Mr. Dick's address and announcements, the meeting was adjourned. In the afternoon and evening the elders and wives were able to attend a question-and-answer session with the Council of Elders and a stress-free, fun-filled talent show.

Workshops

On Monday, May 8, elders and wives had the opportunity to attend three seminars from the following:

- "Effective Preaching Every Week," presented by Randy Schreiber and Donald Ward.

- “Identifying and Working With Future Leaders,” presented by Richard Pinelli and Lyle Welty.
- “Equipped for Works of Service,” presented by Jim Servidio and Dave Myers.
- “Be the Spiritual Leader You Were Meant to Be,” presented by Bill Bradford and Doug Horchak.
- “Computer/Technology Workshop,” presented by Richard Kennebeck, Ken Treybig, Paul Wasilkoff and Dan Dowd.
- “Women Sharing and Fulfilling Titus 2:3-5,” presented by Jenny Bradford, Dyanne Dick, Dee Kilough, Marian Sargent and Jane Suckling (two-part workshop).
- “Cancer—Healthy Perspectives for an Effective Ministry,” presented by Dr. Dan Berendt and Dr. Rick Berendt.

Chairman’s Concluding Remarks

Mr. Dick thanked everyone who contributed to making this GCE a success, including the GCE planning committee, chaired by Ken Giese, which has been working on it much of the year.

He talked about the spirit of calm and settledness enjoyed at this meeting. He related the story of a Cherokee elder talking to two of his grandchildren. The grandfather told them that we all have two wolves fighting inside of us: one of love and good, one of hate and bad. The grandchildren asked, Which wolf will win? The grandfather replied: Whichever one you feed.

Mr. Dick then read Philippians 4:8, reminding the audience to think on these good things. The verse before it tells us about the peace of God that passes understanding. He said he hoped everyone would enjoy the peace that was felt here throughout the coming year.

Mr. Dick called on Dennis Luker, regional pastor and pastor of the Seattle, Washington, congregation, to close the meeting in prayer.

Mike Bennett

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