

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
August 7, 2006 – Cincinnati, OH

Robert Dick called the meeting to order promptly at 9 a.m. During the morning hours the Council laid the groundwork for future General Conference of Elders meetings. The afternoon portion of the meeting was a brainstorming session on the subject of strategic planning.

General Conference of Elders Planning

Mr. Dick reviewed a discussion in the May meetings in which the Council expressed interest in taking steps to more carefully coordinate workshops conducted at the annual GCE with other ministerial education efforts. Mr. Dick read portions of a letter written by Ken Giese, chairman of the 2006 GCE planning committee, who expressed his preference that former chairman Dave Register resume his chairmanship of the committee. Since Mr. Register is education program director and resides in Cincinnati, Mr. Giese said that it seemed natural to incorporate the GCE seminars into the ministerial education program with Mr. Register taking the lead.

Mr. Register, who chaired the planning committee from 2002 through 2005, agreed that the suggestion had merit and agreed to resume that responsibility. No further changes to the committee are planned.

Richard Pinelli agreed with the move, pointing out that Ministerial Services was not previously directly involved in the planning process, which resulted in some overlap between GCE workshops and subjects addressed in regional conferences for the U.S. ministry.

Mr. Dick proposed a resolution that Mr. Register be named the chairman of the GCE planning committee and that under his direction, the committee would be responsible for the physical planning and coordination of the annual meeting. The Council passed the resolution unanimously.

Charles Melear stated that the Holiday Inn Eastgate has again been contracted as the site of the annual GCE meeting, which will take place May 5-7, 2007.

Having addressed the immediate need for the 2007 GCE, Mr. Dick led the Council into a discussion of longer-term plans for future meetings. He started in a roundtable fashion, asking each Council member to express his views. Further discussion continued after each had made his initial comment.

Larry Salyer stated that, in the context of conferences, the different needs of salaried and nonsalaried elders should be taken into account.

Victor Kubik suggested that the workshops must be relevant and that elders should be given enough lead time to prepare for them. The topics, he said, should also be coordinated with other workshop venues such as family weekends and regional conferences.

Jim Franks pointed out that funding and making the GCE equally accessible to elders is always a major challenge. He also emphasized that the Council should clarify goals and purposes for the conference. The business meeting is a legal requirement and, since so many elders are in attendance, it seemed natural to include an educational opportunity. But, he said, we need to have a larger view of what we want to accomplish in the workshops, compared to other venues that include workshops and seminars (such as regional conferences and family weekends).

Richard Thompson brought up the question of how often the GCE should meet. For example, what if there were a conference every three years instead of every year, with all elders in attendance? He suggested that money could be budgeted each year and saved toward the year of the conference so the Church could make it possible for all elders to attend.

Les McCullough said that whatever the frequency of the meetings would be, consideration should be given to international elders, and asked how many would be able to attend.

Leon Walker said that he would like to see more of a concentration on education rather than business. He also emphasized that the meetings should be structured to satisfy the needs of the international ministry, which are different from the needs of the U.S. ministry. For example, the international ministry has less contact with the home office and different levels of experience and background.

Mr. Pinelli commented that the conference should address many different levels of leadership. He suggested that more time is needed for an effective conference. In our previous association, ministers often came for a full week of meetings—during which various classes, discussions and workshops were held, serving different levels of needs.

Bill Eddington suggested that input from international elders needs to be given in the planning process so their needs can be met. He said that there will always be a certain number who cannot attend, and asked what kind of technology is available so they can participate as much as possible. He also suggested that some effort be made ahead of the general conference to streamline the business portion of the meeting.

Clyde Kilough commented that it will be challenging to establish measurement tools to determine the effectiveness of the conference. He suggested the need for more concrete methods to standardize measurements that will result in more objective evaluations.

Aaron Dean said that the conference should be a general meeting of all elders, salaried and nonsalaried.

Mr. Dick asked if it would be possible for the Church to fund every elder's attendance at a conference. And if so, what frequency of meetings would allow that?

After the initial round of comments, discussion focused on the frequency of the meetings and the possibility of restructuring the official business meeting, so that a conference would be more focused on meeting other needs of the ministry.

Mr. McCullough: The Council should clearly communicate the purpose of a conference so elders can prepare, study and give more thought to it.

Mr. Franks: Mr. McCullough's point has been part of the discussion about the GCE meetings from the beginning. Is the annual GCE a business meeting or an educational conference? Maybe we should consider a separate business meeting, which could be conducted electronically, and then have a separate educational conference for elders. Separating the business and voting aspects would remove some of the tension and allow for a more relaxed and productive educational session.

Mr. Dick: It's important to balance the educational and social aspects of the conference. The format we have now for the annual GCE is a response to elders' comments that they didn't come all the way to Cincinnati just to vote. The social aspects are important, but there also needs to be structure.

Mr. Register: Exit surveys consistently indicate that the top two reasons elders attend the GCE are for fellowship and social time with fellow elders and for the workshops and seminars. Participation in the business meeting is a distant third.

Mr. Dick: The real issue might be that elders and wives need contact with each other. Educational seminars provide a valuable opportunity to come together.

Mr. Thompson: Personal contact is intangible and subjective, but very important. The planning process should include some elders who don't have as much contact with the home office, since having the opportunity to come to Cincinnati is more special to them.

Mr. Kubik: When people get together it helps them to share a vision—to exhort one another to good works. The GCE helps boost morale. Nonsalaried elders are a powerful element in the Church, and we should not minimize our support for them. Less frequent conferences would be better if they are more effective.

Mr. Salyer: If there is a conference separate from the business meeting, we should still continue to have international reports and keynote speeches—which help to unify and motivate the elders. The long-term planning decisions should consider the value of regional conferences compared to a major ministerial conference.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Mr. Dick asked Mr. Pinelli to coordinate the effort of creating a broad-based task force representing a cross section of the elders with various points of view, to explore the options and make recommendations to the Council for future meetings of the GCE.

Strategic Planning

Mr. Dick directed the Council into a discussion on the topic of strategic planning. This discussion was a follow-up to the brainstorming session on this topic in the Council meeting held on May 11, 2006. Mr. Dick started the discussion by asking, “Where are we in our strategic planning process?”

Mr. Dean, chairman of the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee, commented that the planning process is different now than when the first plan was written in 1995. The financial situation is more stable and there have been many technological advances. He said that it’s time to look carefully at the plan again and be sure that it clearly states what we want to do, not what we have to do.

Mr. Eddington said that because conditions change so rapidly, many business organizations now only project their strategic plans for one or two years. He commented that the Church’s strategic plan has had only minor edits over the years and that it needs to be updated to be more specific and focused on the Church’s strategic priorities for the next year or two.

Mr. Dick reminded the Council of the previous discussion. The strategic question is: “What are the biggest issues we face as an organization?” He stated that if that’s all we discuss, we are involved in strategic planning. He reminded the Council members that they were all able to answer the question, “What are the three biggest problems we face as an organization?” That is the first level of strategic planning. The other way to approach this level of planning is to ask, “Which challenges can we least afford to neglect?” Mr. Dick summarized that the comments in the previous strategic planning discussion focused on four fundamental areas:

1. The internal, spiritual health of the organization.
2. Developing manpower and using existing manpower.
3. Preaching the gospel, fulfilling the commission—with passion, focus, determination, urgency, etc.
4. Relationships among Sabbatarian groups.

The Council confirmed that it still believes these are the most important strategic issues the Church faces at this time.

A number of comments were offered about the need for energy, enthusiasm, zeal and support on behalf of church pastors, which would result in the members sharing and expressing that enthusiasm and zeal.

Mr. Walker emphasized the need to do more than ask questions. The discussion should lead to action—identifying what needs to be done. Mr. Dick acknowledged that Mr. Walker’s comment identified the next step in the process—deciding what needs to be done to address each of the four strategic areas.

The discussion of specific strategic priorities continued, resulting in the following expansion of the first three strategic areas, with specific action items included.

1. Internal spiritual health of the organization.

Here are the issues/conditions:

- Commitment—develop a higher level.
- Not falling into the cares of the world—less materialism.
- Working in harmony, doctrinal cohesiveness.
- Doctrinal drift in real-life application—Christian living.

Suggestions for what we can do about them:

- Promotion of the achievements of the Church—express zeal, energy.
- The president and administration can convey to the ministry the issues we have talked about—what is involved in developing the spiritual health of the Church and how to do so.
- Strengthen understanding of basic doctrines in the minds of young people (which the proposed education program will be specifically tackling).
- Identify areas of doctrinal drift and suggest ways to deal with them.
- Identify areas of societal drift and suggest ways to deal with them.
- Identify ways to be a success by following God’s way—promote the positive of aspects of godliness.
- Understand patterns of behavior identified in the pastors’ monthly church reports to identify trends that either currently exist or are developing (the positive as well as negative).

2. Developing new manpower and utilizing existing manpower.

Here are the issues/conditions:

- Aging ministry.
- Needs in international areas.

What we are already doing about it through the ministerial development program:

- Four levels of development:
 1. Basic leadership training.
 2. Advanced leadership training.
 3. Training pastors to “find, train, ordain.”
 4. Training new hires.
- In the future, provide mentoring programs for pastors to implement at multiple levels in local areas.
- Restoring honor to the office and calling of the ministry.

“Utilizing existing manpower”:

- We will have more and more entering retirement who will still have much to offer and will desire to contribute to God’s work.
 - Finding viable ways the “elder statesmen” can still be used in a way that will draw on their experience (e.g., mentoring).
3. Preaching the gospel, fulfilling the commission—with passion, focus, determination, urgency, etc.
- The media steering group has been formed and is already at work identifying and addressing broad principles and specific issues.
 - Translate concepts from the media steering group to application in all areas of media.

The Council adjourned for the day at 5 p.m.

Don Henson

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