

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
December 8, 2006 – Cincinnati, OH

Council chairman Robert Dick opened the session at 1 p.m. today, calling on Leon Walker to open with prayer. Mr. Dick commented that this session continues a trend in recent meetings—the agenda has fewer items on it, but they will require more depth of thought and deliberation.

Mr. Dick reviewed portions of the agenda cover letter he sent to the elders prior to the meetings. He recounted the three stages of the development of a new organization, citing his view that United started at “Stage One,” in which the Transitional Board of Directors served as both the board and the administration; progressed through “Stage Two,” in which the Council worked in concert with a small staff, finding itself both governing and managing; and is now in the initial phase of “Stage Three,” where we as an organization have established most policies, and the administrative staff is in place to care for the operation of the organization. This puts the Council, he concluded, in a position to emphasize its appropriate role of governance, rather than administration.

He commented that the President’s Unified Report would give evidence of a stable, calm and growing Church—prepared to move forward with energy, focused on doing the work that is before us.

Mr. Dick requested Council approval of the official minutes for the last session of meetings on August 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9, 2006. Then he introduced Clyde Kilough, Church president, who presented his quarterly unified report to the Council.

President’s Unified Report

Mr. Kilough used the 2006-2007 Operation Plan as the outline for his presentation, highlighting the efforts in each of the operational areas since the last Council meetings. He commented that not only is the Operation Plan being achieved, but more has been added to it, since the income has been greater than what was anticipated.

He pointed out that the recent Feast of Tabernacles provided an accurate measure of the overall state of the Church. Attendance increased, Holy Day offerings were strong and messages were solid. Overall, the reports of the Feast were very positive. Mr. Kilough pointed out that the Church is now in a building mode, focusing outward and on growth rather than having to deal with internal issues. The strong level of income provides the luxury of creativity and the responsibility to invest the resources carefully, and the Council is in a position to make plans for short-term and long-term growth.

Financial Report

Mr. Kilough first focused on the Church's financial circumstances. To put the finances in perspective, Mr. Kilough summarized that for United's first nine years, income increased at a compound rate of 3.45 percent. Over the last four years, the income has grown at a rate of 4.75 percent. In the last fiscal year it increased at a rate of 7.8 percent. Increase for the current fiscal-year-to-date is 8.93 percent. And in the last 365 days the increase is 9.97 percent.

He pointed out that while the Church now finds itself in a very positive financial situation, we must acknowledge that there are no guarantees that this trend will continue. Part of the increase in the surplus is that employee health costs have been below budget—which could change in future years. He also pointed out that the economy could take a sudden downturn, which would have a negative impact on income.

The Church carried surplus income from 2005-2006 into the current fiscal year. And there is now additional surplus because income to this point is greater than what was anticipated. Mr. Kilough said that in the meeting on Sunday the Council will discuss short- and long-range plans. But for the immediate, Mr. Kilough asked operation managers to consider how they would use an increased budget this year.

For example, Mr. Kilough suggested that with the current surplus it would be possible to substantially increase the Media and Communications Services and Ministerial Services budgets and also pay off the mortgage on the home office property, without a negative impact on the current budget and not reducing the mandated cash reserves.

In addition, based on recent trends, the Council is in a position to consider additional budget increases for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Kilough stated his confidence that the Council is in agreement regarding proper and careful stewardship of resources. He strongly emphasized that having some extra income is not something we will take lightly. It is important that the administration not just spend money—but invest it for short-term and long-term benefits to the Church. He also stated that the administration will continue to take a conservative fiscal approach.

Some have asked why there has been an increase in income. Mr. Kilough said there is no single reason. But, he said, we come back to our hope that our ways are pleasing God and He is blessing the Church. It is our hope, he stated, that God finds United to be a church that is striving to honor Him and do the right thing. But, he cautioned, times of blessing are a test to see that we will use the resources wisely.

Ministerial Services

Mr. Kilough turned the Council's attention to Ministerial Services. Using the 2006-2007 Operation Plan as an outline, he described the progress and accomplishments in each area.

- The *Ministerial Services Newsletter and Journal*, which replaced the *Ministerial Quarterly*, has been in monthly production since March 2006 and has already proven to be a helpful monthly communication to the elders.
- Three men have been hired into the full-time ministry. Ron Kelley, Jon Pinelli and Paul Carter are currently being trained by pastors in their church areas.
- Six to eight ministerial transfers are likely and will be finalized in the spring of 2007.
- The hardback hymnal project is progressing under the direction of Steve Myers.
- A meeting was held at the home office on November 1 and 2 with the senior pastors and associates assigned to work in international areas. The purpose of the meeting was to plan how the Church can best serve scattered brethren in these areas:
 - Dave Baker—Philippines and Asia.
 - Fred Kellers (assisted by Mark Mickelson)—Nigeria.
 - Melvin Rhodes (assisted by Tom Clark)—Ghana.
 - John Elliott (assisted by Tim Waddle)—Kenya.
 - Victor Kubik and Johnnie Lambert—Eastern Europe.
- A project is underway to produce a manual containing all policies and resolutions approved by the Council of Elders that are relevant to the ministry.
- A plan for coordinating personal correspondence (including e-mail and regular postal mail) has been developed and will soon be implemented.
- The recent visit to the Living Church of God headquarters by Clyde Kilough and Jim Franks was a proactive effort to develop a better relationship. Representatives of Living accepted an invitation to visit the UCG home office. The importance of the contact is that it helps to establish better communications between the two organizations.
- U.S. church attendance (from monthly church reports) in September 2006 was 11,687—up from 11,235 reported in September 2005.
- Feast of Tabernacles attendance worldwide in 2006 was 20,436 (not including shut-ins), compared to 19,765 (not including shut-ins) in 2005. The increase in attendance in 2006 over 2005 was 3.4 percent. Discussion about the special seminars offered at seven U.S. Festival sites in 2006 and plans for future seminars will be included on the agenda for the Festival coordinators meeting in February 2007.

Ministerial Development

The Ministerial Development Program, under the direction of Richard Pinelli, was in its fledgling stages when the current Operation Plan was written, but has since been fleshed out and is well underway.

The initial round of two-day conferences in each U.S. region is nearly complete. The goal of these meetings is to assist pastors in identifying future leaders and candidates for the full-time ministry. The theme of the conference is “Find, Train, Ordain.” Based on the theme, three essential questions were posed: Where do we find the future ministers? How do we train them? And when do we ordain them? The response to the meetings has been very positive and encouraging.

International areas have also requested assistance in their ministerial development programs. Leadership conferences have been provided in the Philippines, United Kingdom and Canada, and there are plans for conferences in Chile in June 2007 and in South Africa in November.

The fifth U.S. leadership workshop was held over the Labor Day weekend. This year 13 couples attended the five days of meetings. Over the period of five years, 84 couples have participated. Of those, 12 men have been ordained as elders and 12 have been hired into the full-time ministry.

There are currently five programs for leadership training:

1. Basic level. An extensive five-day program, such as was offered in the Philippines and United Kingdom.
2. Advanced program. The annual leadership workshop offered over the Labor Day weekend.
3. The “Find, Train, Ordain” seminar offered to UCG pastors, focusing on engaging the field ministry in the process of training new church pastors.
4. A two-day orientation provided for those newly hired into the full-time ministry and their wives.
5. A six-week training program (given in three two-week blocks in January, March and May 2007) for newly hired full-time ministers and their wives, to help equip them for the responsibility of pastoring. At this point a total of 11 men hired over the last three years are scheduled to participate.

Two additional leadership-training modules are in development—mentoring classes for pastors and leadership training programs that pastors can use in working with their congregations.

Mr. Kilough also reported that when he visited South Africa in August, he learned through André van Belkum of a group of Church members and their leaders in Zambia who were interested in becoming part of United. They had been pressured by their church to change from Sabbath to Sunday observance and to discontinue observing the annual Holy Days.

Victor Kubik visited with a portion of this group during the 2006 Feast of Tabernacles. Mr. Kubik said they are a remarkable group that has maintained their beliefs and practice of God’s truth.

Mr. van Belkum and Kambani Bandi, the UCG elder in Zambia, had a more extensive visit to most of their congregations and with their leadership in late November and were greatly encouraged by their decision to join United.

Education

The Education Advisory Task Force will meet in December to discuss the application of outcomes for priority programs of education. Programs under review include the Ambassador Bible Center (ABC), Sabbath youth instruction, women's planning and education and a preschool program.

The ABC class of 2006 graduated 52 students, the largest number ever. The maximum class size has been accepted for 2007, with 62 students.

The ABC administrative team has had several meetings, undertaking a comprehensive review of the purposes, mission, goals and achievements of ABC and a methodology for measurement of ABC results. A few adjustments will be made to the curriculum in 2007, and a plan is being developed for the 2008 academic year for further refining our acceptance policy.

In future years a greater emphasis will be placed on character development and making ABC a holistic educational experience. A focused emphasis on character development will be added to the mission of covering all of the books in the Bible, showing students how to integrate biblical principles into life. A course will be added to help younger students deal with issues of the postmodern generation—answering questions, for example, about the existence of God and Jesus Christ and the veracity of the Bible—to help them establish a firm foundation.

Six ABC continuing education seminars have been conducted since August of this year, with a total attendance of 461.

Media and Communications Services

A meeting will be held in January 2007 for the managing editors of UCG print publications, for the purpose of brainstorming ways to make our efforts more effective.

Use of all of the UCG Web sites continues to grow. There are five sites in addition to the main UCG site (ucg.org). In the month of November there were 111,899 total visits by users (sessions) on the ucg.org site. There were 145,202 total sessions on the *Good News* site (gnmagazine.org), 5,999 sessions on the *World News and Prophecy* site (wnponline.org), 11,608 sessions on the *Vertical Thought* site (verticalthought.org), 1,471 sessions on the “This Is the Way” e-mail site (thisistheway.org) and 27,581 sessions on the “Beyond Today” program site (BeyondToday.tv).

When a person requests literature, he or she is asked to fill out a survey, which indicates that only about 1 percent of those who are requesting literature from UCG are

members. For the year the most popular pages at the ucg.org site are: index, sermons, booklets and Teen Bible Study Discussion Guides.

Google, the popular online search tool, offers a video search feature where registered viewers can upload videos to the Google video Web site. This free service allows visitors to search for posted videos and either view them online or download them to their local computer. Yahoo now has a similar free service.

As of the end of November, there are 47 *Beyond Today* TV programs and booklet commercials posted on the Google Video Web site and 38 at Yahoo Video. At Google, these files had been viewed over 26,500 times. The most popular program, "Is There Life After Death?", has generated over 3,533 views at Google Video alone. Within the last week or so, *Beyond Today* programs and commercials have also been posted on the YouTube site, which is very popular with the younger crowd. So far, these programs have been accessed at about the same rate as at Google.

The next mailing to *Good News* readers will invite some 200,000 to subscribe to the *Bible Study Course*.

Additional expenditures for advertising are being considered to boost circulation of *The Good News*, *World News and Prophecy* and *Vertical Thought*. The Council will be asked to discuss the matter in the meeting on Sunday, December 10.

A planning meeting for *Beyond Today* production was held in October. The staff spent considerable time reviewing last year's programming, and plans were made for 40 programs to be produced in 2007 on a wide variety of topics. Two format changes are being integrated: about half of the programs will feature one guest instead of two, and the program host will be more involved in the dialogue rather than just asking questions.

The Bible Reading Program is nearing completion of the Old Testament. Much of the material on the New Testament has already been written, which should allow the program to continue smoothly to completion.

The subscription list for the monthly *Good News* e-letter continues to grow. Nearly 24,000 receive this letter, which provides a virtually free monthly follow-up and contact with readers.

The number of donors and coworkers continues to increase steadily. As of October there were 3,381 coworkers on file (a 15 percent increase over last October) and 8,339 donors (a 20 percent increase over last October).

The Council concluded its final hour of business on Friday in executive session.

Don Henson

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