

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
December 11, 2006 – Cincinnati, OH

Robert Dick opened today's meeting at 9 a.m., calling on Richard Pinelli to open with prayer. Mr. Dick briefly summarized the business for the day. First, David Register, chairman of the GCE Planning Task Force, presented a schedule and theme proposal for the 2007 annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders. The Council discussed long-range considerations for scheduling future GCE meetings and the 2006 and 2007 Feast of Tabernacles sermon videos. Leon Walker, chairman of the Doctrine Committee, introduced a new procedure for submission of study papers. The Council passed a resolution dealing with payoff of the home office mortgage. The Council concluded the last two hours of the day in executive session.

GCE Planning Task Force Recommendations

Mr. Register chairs the task force, which also includes Diane Bailey, Bill and Jenny Bradford, Fred Crow, Dan Dowd, Peter Eddington, Frank Fish, Scott Lord and Charles Melear. The purpose of the task force is to coordinate all the elements of the planning and implementation of the annual meeting.

Mr. Register acknowledged Ken Giese and last year's task force for their work in preparing and organizing the 2006 conference. Mr. Register also pointed out that the conference format has been developed over the last few years and will be very similar in 2007.

Mr. Register summarized exit survey results from last year's GCE, comparing them to the exit survey following the 2005 conference. According to the 2006 exit survey:

- The top five primary reasons for attending the conference are fellowship opportunities, the business meeting, workshops and lectures, keynote address and "all elements of the conference."
- 100 percent of respondents were satisfied with the dates of the meeting.
- 96 percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the location city.
- 91 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the accommodations.
- 96 percent were satisfied overall with the conference.
- 91 percent of elders' wives were satisfied or very satisfied
- The top five areas identified as being of the greatest value were fellowship opportunities, keynote addresses, workshops and lectures, business meeting and international reports.
- 84 percent of those who attended the conference stayed for the workshops and lectures on Monday.
- 86 percent rated the overall value of the workshops as valuable or very valuable.

- 92 percent of those who responded to the survey stated they plan to attend the 2007 GCE.

The General Conference is scheduled for May 5 to 7, 2007. The business meeting will take place on May 6. The conference, once again this year, will be at the Holiday Inn Eastgate.

Mr. Register briefly reviewed the overall schedule, which is virtually the same as in recent years. For example, there will be a welcome reception on Friday evening, May 4. Sabbath services on May 5 will be from 2 to 4 p.m. The business meeting will begin at 9 a.m. on Sunday, May 6. Workshops and seminars will be offered on Monday, May 7.

The Council engaged in a lengthy discussion about the value of and most appropriate format for the question-and-answer sessions for the operation managers (which was held last year on Saturday evening) and Council of Elders (last year on Sunday evening). Several ideas were put forward. Council members agreed that Q&A is an important facet of the conference. Mr. Register will work with Ministerial Services and the Council in developing a different format that will make the Q&A more effective and useful.

Ideas for changes to the exit survey were also suggested that would help the task force gather more detailed information about the effectiveness of the conference.

The task force report recommended three potential themes for the conference. After consideration of all three, the Council unanimously agreed on the theme “Build the House.” The introduction to this theme in the task force report provides an overview:

This theme encompasses the basic idea of everything the Church should be doing:

- Become the spiritual temple the Father has envisioned.
- Prepare a people to contribute to the building of the temple.
- Become a unified and cohesive structure.
- Build with a sense of purpose and zeal.

The Council expressed its approval of the task force’s work. Mr. Register will present a completed plan for the annual GCE at the February-March Council meetings.

Future GCE Meetings

Mr. Dick led the Council into a discussion of long-range plans for future meetings of the General Conference of Elders. He referred to a document produced in May 2005 by the Conferencing Task Force, chaired by Ken Giese and including Larry Greider and Mr. Register.

Richard Pinelli, who commissioned the study in 2005 when he was the manager of Ministerial Services, explained the task force’s three primary objectives:

1. To examine current methods of organizing, scheduling and funding the annual meeting of the GCE, recommending specific alternatives and options.
2. To examine current efforts at developing and training current pastors.
3. To offer options for effective recruitment of future pastors.

The Council discussed the paper at its meetings in February-March 2006. The second and third points have been addressed in the Ministerial Development Program, which Mr. Pinelli now coordinates. Mr. Pinelli pointed out that the question at this point is whether the Council wishes to take a look at the issues inherent in the organizing, scheduling and funding of the GCE and potential alternatives and options. If the Council chooses to do so, it would need to establish a task force and provide it with clear and specific directions.

Mr. Dick remarked that it was very expensive for the Church to pay for all elders to attend the first GCE in December 1995, but given the unprecedented circumstances, it was necessary and worth the investment. In subsequent years elders have paid their own expenses to attend the GCE. But since it was prohibitively expensive for elders outside the United States to attend, a funding process was developed to sponsor a representative from each international area to come to the conference.

One illustration of the Church's current stable condition is that this is the first year at which it is likely that there will be no proposed amendments to the Constitution or Bylaws on the ballot. Given the changes in the Church and its current condition, the question arises, "Is it necessary to continue to have an annual meeting to conduct the business of the General Conference of Elders?" With current methodology and technology it is no longer necessary for the GCE to have a conference to conduct its annual business meeting.

Mr. Dick stated that this is a huge question, opening a number of other issues and questions that would need to be seriously considered. For example, if the GCE meeting were held less frequently and if funds equal to the current cost of the conference were set aside each year, how long would it take to fund attendance for all the elders? And, he posed, is that even feasible?

Mr. Dick distributed a memo that emphasized that the Council should keep in mind the needs and concerns of the elders in any discussion of change to scheduling of the GCE meetings. He stated, for example, that if the GCE were to meet less frequently, it would be important to explain what contact and communication would take place during the year in lieu of the annual meeting.

Mr. Dick opened the floor to discussion. He asked Council members to express their opinions and ideas about the current GCE system, whether they felt a study of potential changes should be undertaken and, if so, how broad a study into the issues would be appropriate at this time. The following is a summary of their comments.

- The time is right for the Council to initiate a broad-based study, fully exploring all of the issues. We need to take whatever time is necessary to complete it and present the GCE with options.
- Economic inequities are among the biggest issues. Most elders in international areas and many U.S. elders are not able to attend due to the expense. But it would be very difficult for the Church to pay the expense of bringing every elder to the conference.
- It would not require a change to the Bylaws for business meetings to be conducted electronically instead of in person, though some other options and changes may require amendments.
- The need for a conference for U.S. pastors is not as great now as it was in the past because there are other points of contact and communication, such as regional conferences.
- There is a more urgent need for regular contact and communication in international areas because they are more scattered and often don't have regional conferences. There might be an opportunity to create international zones, for example the nations in Asia and the Pacific, and bring elders together in those areas for a meeting similar to U.S. regional conferences.
- A task force studying into these issues must have strong international representation.
- It will probably be two or three years before a task force can complete its study, make its recommendations and for changes to be initiated.
- The end product of a task force would be a proposal to the GCE. Since the GCE will ultimately make the decisions about the conferences, GCE members must fully understand the issues, questions and options.

Mr. Dick deferred discussion on individuals assigned to the task force to the February-March meetings. For now, Council members were asked to submit to Mr. Pinelli or Mr. Dick the questions and issues they feel should be addressed in the study.

2006 and 2007 Feast Videos

Mr. Kilough led the Council in a review of the 2006 Feast of Tabernacles sermon video and preliminary plans for 2007.

All Council members reported that the response to the 2006 video was very positive at the Feast sites they attended. Positive comments were made on content as well as technical quality. Mr. Kilough thanked and complimented video editor Clay Thornton for the results of his efforts.

Mr. Kilough provided the Council with a written overview of plans for the 2007 video, which will focus on Europe. The working title for the video is, "Europe, the Church and the Kingdom to Replace All Kingdoms."

The video will focus on three main sections:

1. A sermon message about Europe, the Church of God and how prophecy and God's Kingdom will affect all of mankind.
2. A special focus about the brethren and the work in Europe.
3. A message from Mr. Kilough on the major accomplishments of the past year and goals for the future—looking forward to God's Kingdom.

Based on the preliminary outline and input from the Council, work will continue on current plans for the video. Final approval for a more complete draft will be necessary at the February-March meetings.

Revised Doctrine and Prophecy Study Paper Procedure

Mr. Walker, chairman of the Council's Doctrine Committee, introduced a new process for reviewing study papers submitted on doctrine and prophecy. He explained that there was a need early in UCG's history for doctrinal study papers to clearly establish the Church's teaching and position. While a few papers are still submitted from time to time by members and elders on various subjects, the essential study papers have now been completed, and we do not anticipate the need for many study papers in the future.

The new process makes the work of the Doctrine Committee an appellate function rather than an administrative function. The Council unanimously approved a resolution establishing the new process, which will be communicated in detail to the elders in an upcoming *Ministerial Services Newsletter and Journal*.

Resolution to Pay Off Home Office Mortgage

As mentioned in the December 10 report, the Council has agreed that surplus funds should be used to pay off the remaining amount on the home office mortgage. Mr. Kilough submitted to the Council a resolution authorizing the administration to do so before the end of the current (2006-2007) fiscal year. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the resolution.

The Council finished the last two hours of the day in executive session.

Don Henson

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