

United Church of God, *an International Association*
General Conference of Elders Meeting Report
May 6-7, 2007 – Cincinnati, OH

Chairman Bob Dick called the General Conference of Elders Annual Meeting to order at 9 a.m. on May 6. He called on Arnold Hampton, pastor of the Columbia and Cumberland, Maryland, and several Caribbean congregations, to open with prayer.

The theme of this year's conference is "Build the House."

Introduction of New Elders

Mr. Dick introduced the 16 new elders ordained or credentialed in the last year.

- Nelson Arnold
- Kim Boykin
- Paul Carter
- Shawn Cortelyou
- Gregory Czech
- Randy Duke
- Gordon Hannaway
- Edward Johnson
- Donald Mathie
- Scott Moss
- Laurie Nyhus
- David Payne
- John Perry
- Elifazi Salawila
- Donald Turgeon
- Art Verschoor

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, budget, nomination and election process and the home office relocation proposal.

At the end of the day Secretary David Johnson presented the results compiled by the auditing firm of Clark, Schaefer, Hackett & Co. to Mr. Dick, who announced that:

- The Strategic Plan was ratified with 318 yes votes.
- The Operation Plan was ratified with 307 yes votes.
- The budget was ratified with 281 yes votes.

- The revised nomination and election process (requiring potential Council nominees to indicate that they are willing and able to serve on the Council) was approved with 321 yes votes. (The previous process allowed elders to indicate if they were unwilling to serve, but did not require a response to be considered for nomination.)
- The proposal to relocate the home office to the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, metroplex area was ratified with 202 yes votes to 195 no votes.
- The Council members chosen were:
Roy Holladay
Clyde Kilough
Victor Kubik
Robert Berendt (international).

Keynote Address

After the balloting in the morning, Mr. Dick introduced President Clyde Kilough for the keynote address. Mr. Kilough said he struggled with narrowing down the topic of “Build the House” for the keynote. He decided to make it a “question-and-answer” session, with three questions for the audience to think about.

1. What have we built so far, and how will it stand up to inspection?

Mr. Kilough quoted from 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 to demonstrate that our work will be tested. Collectively we are building one building, the Church. The wood, hay and stubble Paul talked about are shallow things without much substance. Wisdom and character are needed to pass the test.

Mr. Kilough quoted Matthew 7, showing that we need to build on a rock by doing the things Christ taught. *Doing* is the hard part. How does the ministry help the people of God build on the rock? Mr. Kilough said we must build ourselves before teaching others how to build.

Mr. Kilough said that the most important things in spiritual real estate (like the saying goes for physical real estate) is location, location, location. Where are we spiritually?

God is keenly interested to see how we respond to tests. Our studies are the class work; our prayers are the consultation with the teacher; the trials in life are the tests.

God can bail us out of bad decisions, but can't easily bail us out of a bad spiritual location. God looks at our hearts—what have we built? Have we built faith? Have we built into ourselves a quick spiritual response of prayer and fasting in the face of trials and tough decisions?

Mr. Kilough pointed out that on May 6, exactly 12 years ago, on the first Sabbath after the Indianapolis conference when United was founded, we were flattened and vulnerable. Because of that, we put prayer and fasting three times in the constitution of United, realizing the source of our strength and unity.

We want God to be pleased to hear us, and we want to come to like-mindedness. Mr. Kilough related the *Barnes' Notes* comments on 1 Corinthians 1:10, showing that a union of feeling is possible even when our views differ. Wisdom and knowledge will be our stability (Isaiah 33:5-6).

2. What have we learned in the process of building the house?

Mr. Kilough pointed out that our ability to process the lessons we are learning is very important. He quoted a humorous statement he had heard on the news from Donald Rumsfeld, which went something like this: "I have benefited greatly from the criticisms, and at no time have I suffered a lack thereof."

Knowing our strengths allows us to know what to build on. Knowing our weaknesses allows us to see our vulnerabilities.

Mr. Kilough explained that when we look back on a challenging situation, we need to:

- Analyze what we have done well and done poorly.
- Learn the right lessons.
- Zealously implement what will make things better.

We don't all have the same opinions, but we are required to have the same mind—having the same love for one another and being of the same accord (Philippians 1:27; 2:2). That's the mortar that holds the bricks together, Mr. Kilough said.

Continuing the building analogy, Mr. Kilough said that in the discussions of the home office relocation, we have had to put on our hard hats, since sometimes we have dropped a hammer from the third floor on each other. Have we learned conflict resolution? he asked. One of the keys to conflict resolution is understanding that we may have different positions and opinions, but we can still have shared interests.

Mr. Kilough said that one of the greatest lessons is to "let the peace of God rule in your hearts" or preside over our minds (Colossians 3:15).

3. What do we yet need to build?

When Mr. Kilough moved to Sacramento, California, he saw bridges being retrofitted after an earthquake. We also need to do some bridge building, Mr. Kilough said. Treat people right, he's often joked, because someday you may be related to them.

Tying the keynote back to previous messages, Mr. Kilough said we come back to the power of a mission-driven Church—pulled together by and passionate about that mission. The mission unites. It's shared by heroes of the past. We need to ask ourselves: Are my actions and words going to further the mission? When we are all mission-focused, it's easier to overlook the shortcomings of each other. It's God's mission, not ours. We must be visionary people, Mr. Kilough said. Visionaries are rare. They won't sacrifice their futures for short-term frustrations.

We must demonstrate to the Church, the world and to God that we can have a dispute, make a decision and then walk arm-in-arm, Mr. Kilough said.

International Reports

This year five international reports were presented.

Portuguese-Language Areas

Jorge de Campos reported that the needs in the Portuguese-speaking areas are great. He said there's low-hanging fruit we haven't been able to harvest because of lack of manpower. Portuguese is the third most-spoken European language in the world and the sixth-most spoken language in the world.

He explained that the Spanish and Portuguese peoples have had animosity toward each other, making it so we can't reach unconverted Portuguese people using the Spanish language. Portuguese people don't learn Spanish as a second language. In fact, now in Portugal they're teaching English as a second language in schools.

Mr. de Campos mentioned that we are focusing on feeding the flock now. He is recording Portuguese sermons at least once a month that are heard by about 40 people. He also produces a Portuguese *United News*, and several booklets have been printed and several more are translated, but need to be reviewed. We have a Portuguese Web site and hold a Feast in Portugal each year.

Mr. de Campos encouraged everyone to pray for more laborers in the Portuguese-speaking areas. (For more information, see the article about the Portuguese work in the May *United News*, page 4.)

New Zealand and the South Pacific

Jeff Caudle reported that about 50 people attend church in Auckland, New Zealand, and that there are about 150 brethren total in New Zealand. (There were 44 members when Mr. Caudle went there.) About 100 brethren don't see each other except at Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

There are eight nationalities in the Church in New Zealand, and some recent immigrants don't speak English very well at this point. Mr. Caudle also mentioned that

Christianity is declining in popularity in New Zealand, and that 40 percent of New Zealanders claim no religious affiliation at all.

Art Verschoor was ordained an elder last Pentecost. He is a great help when Mr. Caudle travels to serve the brethren he also pastors in Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Mr. Caudle reported that the income in New Zealand is NZ\$110,000 now, and that they receive a small subsidy from the United States. Currently 2,400 *Good News* magazines are mailed each issue. Brethren help with all the other mailings. He said they hope to increase the *Good News* circulation to about 5,000 using *Reader's Digest* magazine and Google and Yahoo Internet ads. He also mentioned that UCG–New Zealand has just launched a Web site.

In the South Pacific, Fiji is the primary area of growth, with over 300 subscribers. The brethren in Tonga have been migrating to New Zealand and Australia. There have been riots in Tonga since the death of the king, and the new king is unpopular.

Mr. Caudle mentioned that Walesi Toloi in Fiji died April 28. He said it is a very challenging time for her husband, Emori, and their son, Emori Jr., age 8. In spite of all this, Emori told Mr. Caudle that he just wants to do the work of God.

Mr. Caudle also reported that the South Pacific in general is politically leaning away from the United States and toward Asia.

German Region and the Netherlands

Alfred Riehle reported that there are 150 brethren in the German-language region. There are six congregations in Germany and one in Switzerland. There are also 35 brethren in the Netherlands.

The main tool in reaching the German areas is the German version of *The Good News*, *Gute Nachrichten*. There are currently 4,619 subscribers, which is a 13.8 percent increase over last year.

Currently there are 17 booklets in German, as well as the entire *Bible Study Course*. The German study course includes three tests that students need to complete to get a certificate of completion.

The local version of *United News* is *Intern*, and there are 400 subscribers. It is offered to *Gute Nachrichten* readers, and so over 80 percent of *Intern* readers have no previous involvement with the Church.

The German brethren help proofread booklets, and a final team of six editors makes the last corrections.

For advertising they are now using Google and Yahoo keyword ads. The German Web site is now averaging 9,000 unique visitors a month.

Members in Germany help with the mailings. After eight years, the Church in Germany rented its first office, where Jesmina Allaoua works.

The Netherlands uses the English *Good News*, producing a Dutch supplement that is inserted into it. There are 1,050 subscribers, a 100 percent increase over the last two years. There are six booklets now in Dutch, and two more should be printed this year. They have also translated the entire *Bible Study Course*, and the first two lessons are now online.

East Africa

John Elliott reported that most of the members in East Africa are in Kenya. The Church has been registered in Kenya, and we are working on getting it registered in Uganda and Tanzania.

Mr. Elliott pointed out that these nations are in a dangerous area of the world, very near the problems in Somalia and Sudan, for instance.

There are 850 people attending the United Church of God in East Africa. We have no elders there, but four deacons serve the brethren, two of them full-time. Currently there are 119 baptized members in 15 congregations and a number of Bible studies. Tim Waddle was recently named associate senior pastor and will take two trips a year to East Africa.

There are 1,500 *Good News* subscribers in East Africa. Interestingly, Ethiopia and Eritrea are second and third in *Good News* subscribers in the region. Some of the core literature has been translated into Swahili, Kuo and Kisii. The hymnal has also been translated into Swahili.

Mr. Elliott mentioned that he recently trained 18 new congregational leaders to help in the congregations. The deacons are only able to visit each congregation once a month.

Who are the genuine sheep? Mr. Elliott pointed out that there is a lot of interest in the Church, and it can be challenging to tell who is really being called. He said there is a 60 percent growth rate even though they have to attend weekly, tithe and keep the commandments before they can receive assistance from the Church.

Good Works projects in East Africa include providing Church meeting halls, famine relief, disease preventative water filters, mosquito nets and water wells. Mr. Elliott said water wells benefit Church members and the surrounding communities as well. He pointed out the need for caring for widows and orphans in our congregations. He mentioned a youth camp will be held in December for 75 teens and 20 staff.

French-Speaking Region

Joel Meeker reported that there are French-speaking members in Europe, Canada, the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian Ocean. (The francophone Canadian areas are administered by the Canadian office.) In Europe, the 50 members are spread across France, Belgium and Switzerland—in an area bigger than Texas.

There are African members in Rwanda (with 70 to 80 attending), Cameroon, Togo, Benin and Ivory Coast. We also have one faithful member in Burkina Faso and one in Gabon. There are about a dozen members in Mauritius and Reunion islands in the Indian Ocean and 10 in Martinique (an island in the Caribbean that is a part of France).

There are interested groups in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar. (See the story of the “coincidences” that led someone in Madagascar to contact the Church on page 4 of the May *United News*.)

“Attendance” in the French-speaking area is about 300 people who receive sermon recordings.

Currently there are 13 countries with French-speaking members. The French version of *The Good News* has a circulation of 1,200, which they hope to double this year. Bernard Hongerlout helps with the editorial efforts. They also print a wall calendar with pictures of members around the world to remind all the brethren that this is a worldwide work. Mr. Meeker mentioned the French Web site and said they would begin banner advertising on the Internet as well.

He also mentioned leadership training in French Africa and Good Works projects, such as constructing church halls and providing dental care in Rwanda.

Tribute to the Deceased Elders and Wives

Ken Giese led a tribute to four elders and wives, with photos, tributes from family and friends and a printed brochure. He mentioned that 65 elders and wives have died in United since 1995. Those remembered were:

- Robert Allen Borton
- Phillip Carl Fowler
- Evelyn Keeley
- Jack Wayne Williams

Address From the President

After lunch, Mr. Dick introduced Mr. Kilough again for the address from the president.

What has been done in the last year? Mr. Kilough said there's a lot going on, and the news has been reported in *United News*, *Ministerial Newsletter*, etc. So instead of a recap, Mr. Kilough decided to address the question: "What's on my mind every day as I come to work?"

He said his focus comes mostly from working with the Council and following its directives. Last May the Council discussed four major areas that the Church needs to focus on: the internal spiritual health of the Church; manpower issues (which are being addressed through new ministerial education programs); preaching the gospel (the Media Steering Group has been working on many of these issues); and relationships with other Sabbatarian groups (for example, the friendly meeting with the leadership of the Living Church of God last October).

God has given us an exciting mission and great work to do. Mr. Kilough said he goes to work with energy every day.

Address From the Treasurer

Treasurer Tom Kirkpatrick recounted recent statistics on the growth of UCG's income well above the inflation rate and encouraged the audience to not take these blessings for granted. For example, the increase for the current fiscal year is now 8 percent over this point in the previous fiscal year.

Dr. Kirkpatrick reminded the elders that we continue to face challenges as we face the future, and said that the blessings we receive are financial manna, and its source is God (Matthew 17:27).

Address From the Ministerial Services Operation Manager

Jim Franks said that two things have become abundantly clear. If Christ doesn't return soon, we will have a shortage of pastors, and our best teachers are also aging.

For historical perspective, Mr. Franks described the rapid growth of the Radio Church of God from 1933 to 1953. In spite of the tremendous reach of the organization by 1953, still only about 1,000 people were attending the Feast of Tabernacles. But that time was a turning point, as other pastors in addition to Herbert Armstrong were now being ordained, and growth in baptisms also increased.

Mr. Franks said there is no expiration date on doing the work of God. He described how the ministerial development program has been instrumental in hiring 14 new pastors. He also talked about taking the training to many other parts of the world. He said another round of the new six-week training program is planned, and will include current pastors. He said they expect to continue that program.

He said there will be five regional conferences this year, and then four the following year, with the theme "Study to Show Yourself Approved."

He then gave a number of statistics:

- 33 percent of the Church is under the age of 30 (in Houston, where he served previously, 50 percent were under the age of 20).
- 94 pastors serve 217 congregations in the United States.
- Average weekly attendance in the United States is 11,500. On the First Holy Day of Unleavened Bread over 13,000 attended. The total number on our rolls is over 15,000.
- The average increase in Feast attendance has been 4 percent; in local areas, it has been 1 to 3 percent.

Matthew 9:38 reminds us that this is God's harvest. Mr. Franks encouraged everyone to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Address From the Media and Communications Services Operation Manager

Peter Eddington began his address by thanking the many ministers involved as writers, reviewers, editors, presenters, etc. for the Church's media products.

He listed a number of growth statistics:

- April was the best month ever at gnmagazine.org, with 182,500 visitors.
- April was also the best month for *Beyond Today* responses.
- The *Vertical Thought* Web site also showed dramatic increases over the previous year.
- There are now a record 356,000 U.S. subscribers to *The Good News*.
- The *Reader's Digest* ad has received over 25,000 responses so far, and the *American Baby* and *Parents* ad responses are coming in as well.

Mr. Eddington then discussed where the marketing and media industry is headed, showing that broadband Internet connections are growing dramatically around the world. The United States and China are the largest broadband markets, and there were 250 million households worldwide with broadband at the end of 2006. And now countries like Japan (52 percent) and South Korea (80 percent) are moving to even higher speed Internet. Optical fiber to the home (FTTH) offers 50 to 100 times the speed.

We need to continue to capitalize on these trends, Mr. Eddington said.

Who's watching Internet video? Not just the kids. Over one third of everyone over age 3 watches Internet video at least once a month, Mr. Eddington pointed out. Statistics show 87 percent of the U.S. population has watched video online at some time, and 63 percent of those who visit video sites are over 45. That's why we put a concerted effort into posting videos to Google, Yahoo, YouTube and now GodTube (officially launched May 1, and already the top Christian Web site).

Mr. Eddington showed a clip from ABC's *Nightline* program two weeks before that discussed GodTube and featured video from a *Beyond Today* program on pornography.

Mr. Eddington also pointed out that more information will be produced this year than the total storage space available. Getting the right information at the right time is getting harder. That's another reason our message has to be relevant, or people will move on.

We need to allocate as many resources as possible to these efforts, Mr. Eddington said.

Address From the Chairman

Bob Dick mentioned that he was giving his address before knowing the results of the home office relocation proposal (which were announced after his speech). He began by remembering a Feast trip that put him in Frankfurt, Germany, during the reunification of East and West Germany. Soon all of Eastern Europe was free, and Russia itself was on the path to democracy. But with the strong tradition of autocratic rule, the question has long been asked: Can Russia learn democracy?

Mr. Dick reminded the elders and wives that as a Church, we have autocratic roots. The options in the worst case in autocratic systems are to be quiet or to leave. This only creates a verbal black market. Many left to say: No one will ever tell me what to do again! Others wanted the security and comfort of the same government they were used to.

Mr. Dick said the United Church of God is unique—we chose a different path. We face a similar challenge to the former Soviet Union. Can we make a significant cultural shift? Yes, and we have.

Of course each of us in United has a tendency to lean one way or the other. Mr. Dick said that has not stopped us from putting the work ahead of personal leanings.

He further reminded the elders that either way the vote comes out, the Council will continue to address the primary issues that led to a proposal for expansion, including discussions of ministerial training, of making ABC more of a character-building institution, and of present and future space shortages.

Mr. Dick concluded by reminding everyone that we have chosen a form of church governance that allows us many freedoms, but to preserve these freedoms, we must use them responsibly.

Mr. Dick then received and reported the results of the balloting (included earlier in this report).

Workshops

On Monday, May 7, the elders and wives were able to chose to attend three of the following workshops:

1. Preaching Effective Sermonettes (Richard Pinelli and Jon Pinelli).
2. Bringing the Scriptures to Life (Dave Johnson).
3. Facilitating Interactive Bible Studies (Roger West and Paul Luecke).
4. Conducting Small Group Bible Studies (Bob Fahey).
5. Effective Use of Inductive Teaching (Ralph Levy and Randy Stiver).
6. Congregational Tapestry: Building Cross-Generational Bridges and Bonds in Our Congregations (Dave Register and Julie Zutz).
7. Women's Workshop—"Building Her House" (Women's Planning Task Force).

Mr. Dick concluded the day with thank yous to the many people involved in putting on the GCE meetings. He then asked Dave Baker, senior pastor for Asia, to conclude the meetings in prayer.

Mike Bennett

-end-