

United Church of God, *an International Association*
CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY
Council of Elders Aug. 5-8, 2007, Meetings—Cincinnati, Ohio

Welcome to the August Chairman's Commentary. As was mentioned in May, we intend this to be an ongoing way in which the Council can share with the members of the GCE the reasons behind our decisions and invite everyone into a deeper look at the workings of the Council.

Council Committees

Normally there is a day of committee meetings prior to the start of Council meetings. This time I asked that we all meet together to do a full review of all committees. We were at an unusual time as we came into the August meeting. We had dropped two of our committees—Media and Education—and needed to reassign their members to new committee work. We further had divided ERR into an Ethics Committee and a Roles and Rules Committee and needed to staff both. On top of all of this, only one committee had a valid acting chairman as one chairman resigned and one's term expired.

We took a shortened day to go through the description of each committee's work so everyone could determine where he best could serve. We also took time to field questions from the newer members of the Council about committees, their work and expectations placed upon those who serve on each committee.

We gave Council members time to consider where they wished to serve, and on the last day of the meetings they committed to their choices. I am not sure if all of you are aware of procedures, but each committee selects its own chairman. Committee by committee we sent the members out of the room on Wednesday to select their chairmen. Please see Don Henson's report for the names of all committee members and their chairs.

Strategic Planning and the August Meeting

A major portion of the August meeting was dedicated to strategic planning. Nearly all of Monday and a significant block of time on Tuesday and Wednesday was spent on strategic planning. We expressed a desire to begin a full rewrite of our strategic plan in February, but home office relocation discussions consumed the majority of the time in the February and May meetings. This made it even more imperative that significant time be dedicated to the subject in August.

On Monday we had a full discussion on the strategic planning process and what is involved in doing it well. On Friday each Council member was given a survey to complete in preparation for Monday's discussion. We went through a 35-slide PowerPoint presentation from BoardSource that was designed to walk a nonprofit board through every critical question that must be addressed before committing to full organizational strategic planning. Every Council

member expressed support for moving forward with a full rewrite of our strategic plan and beginning the process immediately.

We selected a search committee to begin the search for a suitable facilitator, and the three members—Jason Lovelady, Dee Kilough and Linda Register—met with Clyde Kilough and me on Thursday to discuss the necessary qualifications for a facilitator. It was universally felt by the Council that none of us should serve as facilitator, as a high level of objectivity and detachment is needed to do this job correctly. As soon as a facilitator is found, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee can begin to work with him on a “plan to plan”—a document that maps out the steps, the timetable and the people to be involved in the process. Eventually, among the steps, will be a full board/staff retreat to focus solely on the critical issues that will be part of the strategic plan.

While this is a major undertaking, it was clear that there was full Council commitment to the task and satisfaction that this issue was finally moving forward in a structured way.

Executive Session Time

All elders received a copy of the agenda for the August meeting, and it was noted that executive session time would be needed for specific issues. The executive session time on Monday was spent on ordinations, ministerial health and retirement issues and a lengthy legal report. This would be a good time to explain the legal report, as there are always concerns about how much time is spent in executive session and whether these discussions should be in open or closed sessions.

The legal report is a standard part of each Council meeting. Since we are an international religious organization, the report can include legal updates for situations in any country that seeks legal help from the home office. This session the report was seven pages long and, as it usually does, contains a report on all current cases dealing with discrimination against our members in the workplace or against their children in school situations. It deals with all contractual issues related to building/hall leases and the review of those leases. It further deals with immunization, jury duty and military service cases. We are informed of visa issues for people we wish to bring to the United States for meetings, assistance requested in child custody cases, member discipline and appeal cases, estate matters and UCG employment and insurance issues.

Since all of these issues contain the names of those involved and allow for discussion with our attorney as to the disposition of the cases, it is easy to understand their need to be dealt with in executive session. While on the agenda it simply appears as “legal update,” that doesn’t make it clear why this can involve considerable time in a meeting.

On another executive session matter, we are currently trying to walk a fine line and keep in open session as much discussion that involves individuals’ names as possible. In the selection of people to serve on various committees and task forces, we will approve as many as possible in open session. The difficult part is when there is an objection raised against a specific person’s service due to a perception the person is not qualified. This cannot be discussed in open session.

I have informed the Council that in a desire to keep as much in open session as possible, we would discuss appointments and selections in open session with one caveat—if objections are raised to the qualifications of an individual and the person must be discussed as an individual, that discussion must go into executive session. Following Monday’s executive session, some time was spent in this manner on Wednesday.

There is one more executive session issue on which it is frankly difficult to get a handle. Our meetings are official board meetings with a call and notice and a set agenda. Since we travel from several areas and only meet as a board during four specified times in the year, it is nearly impossible to have time to simply sit and carry on a free-form brainstorming session except while we are together. We did that on Tuesday in executive session. I don’t believe we handled any business matters or called for any resolutions. We sat and talked with the president about moving forward on the home office relocation. He wanted to hear where every member of the Council was on that matter.

All of us have watched military movies where someone has strong emotions about an issue. The person then asks for “permission to speak freely.” This has been the military way of removing all formalities and pressures of rank so that candid, open discussion can take place. Without this mechanism or something akin to it, many important, heartfelt matters are never discussed. Every Council meeting is on the record, and it is just as true with us as with the military that if there is no “permission to speak freely” time for discussion, some things of importance will never get discussed. In this setting Clyde was able to get a full, open discussion of the feelings of each member of the Council on all matters related to relocation. The reality is just as applicable to our world as to that of the military—we need some off-the-record time for discussion.

Home Office Relocation

The Council reporter noted in his report that Jason Lovelady visited 75 properties in the area approved by the GCE and that Mr. Kilough visited most of them. He reviewed a few of the most promising ones with the Council on Wednesday in executive session and as the search narrows will seek to have some of the properties viewed by Council members.

I guess that wraps things up for the August session. While there are always many things that can be reviewed in a commentary, I have tried to address those which everyone wishes to better understand and still complete the task before the weekend. Please feel free to write and let me know if we are omitting ones important to you.

Have a good Sabbath,

Bob Dick
Chairman

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