

**United Church of God, *an International Association***  
**Council of Elders Meeting Report**  
**Feb. 29, 2008—San Antonio, Texas**

Chairman Robert Dick called this session of meetings to order at 9 a.m. in the conference room of the La Quinta Inn and Suites, San Antonio Convention Center. All Council members were present. The Council had already attended three full days of intensive strategic planning meetings prior to this regularly scheduled quarterly meeting. After the opening prayer, Church President Clyde Kilough was introduced for the unified report, which is given at the beginning of each session.

**President's Report**

Mr. Kilough commented that it has only been 11 Sabbaths since the last quarterly Council meetings in December and that it has been an extremely busy time with various home office and regional activities. The current round of sicknesses and flu in this country has hit many of the employees in the home office as well.

**Ministerial Services Update**

Mr. Kilough began this update by stating the ministry was saddened and sobered by the death of William Winner. Eight congregations are now without a resident pastor, emphasizing the need for pastoral development, which was identified as the number one priority in the recent strategic planning meetings. The U.S. situation is just the tip of the iceberg in the need for more pastors. Richard Pinelli, who has been entrusted with pastoral and leadership development, has been asked to help out in the international areas as well. In this fiscal year, he has been to South Africa, Australia and recently to Eastern Canada.

In the Australian meetings, Mr. Pinelli, accompanied by Greg Sargent, presented leadership material to over 48 husbands and wives. The Canadian ministry asked Mr. Pinelli to provide an experimental program similar to the leadership weekend that occurs over the Labor Day weekend in the United States. The attendance was 32, and the Canadian administration will take this training program and promote it throughout the country. Canada is in greater need of pastors than the United States, as their average age is 63.

The six-week, in-depth session of pastoral training has begun for its second year. Seven international elders are in attendance. This program provides initial training for newly hired pastors, plus allowing veteran pastors to review and upgrade their skills. Pastors today are dealing with various issues that weren't prevalent 10 or 20 years ago.

Roy Holladay asked what further planning will be added to this current training program. Jim Franks stated that a new hire will be given one year of class training in conjunction with ABC classes, and one year of field training under a seasoned pastor.

Mr. Kilough mentioned that some leadership training in the international areas will be coordinated through some of the senior pastors for those areas.

The next item discussed was the United Youth Corps. Matthew and Mary Ann Bates are now in Jordan, and plans include sending six more volunteers to Jordan, especially young married couples. The Jordan contacts are very pleased by what the Church is doing there. Mr. Kilough said that for a young person to have international experience for a 10-month period is just extremely valuable for them and for the future of the Church. Other Youth Corps opportunities on the docket include helping with the youth camps in Nigeria, Ghana and the Philippines.

ABC is in session with 32 students ranging in age from 18 to 67. Aaron Dean asked if some young people may lose any scholarships by having to take a full year off from school to attend ABC. Mr. Kilough stated that the original plan for ABC was that it would be nine months long. The current courses just can't be completed fully in seven months. In the future, applicants will be able to adjust their education plans accordingly.

Secretary David Johnson, who also teaches at ABC, stated that when some students finished attending a local community college, they attended ABC prior to going to a full university to finish up their degree. Mr. Kilough also commented that the young people are advised not to lose their scholarships. Students are usually encouraged to complete their education and then attend ABC. The advice generally given to parents and young people is that a person will get a lot more out of ABC if he or she comes later rather than sooner.

There were some questions about the assigning of pastors to the eight congregations without a resident pastor. Mr. Franks answered that a compilation of new hires and some transfers will fill those spots. For instance, Arnold Hampton will be moving to south Florida to fill the vacancy in West Palm Beach. Five men have been hired into the full-time ministry in the last two years, but others were unable to accept employment for personal reasons. For example, some have family situations where they can't move, some have financial obligations and commitments into which they are locked. Most of those who declined employment said their desire was to be hired, but "not now." The candidates are elders, and they continue to help out in their local areas.

### **Media Update**

Mr. Kilough discussed the remarkable events that took place in December 2007 concerning the AP article that was written about Christians who don't keep Christmas, highlighting the Church. The article went around the world in a matter of days, and other pastors were asked for interviews, including Jerry Aust, Arnold Hampton, Todd Carey and Denny Luker. This all happened without any planning on our part, nor could we have ever afforded this type of media exposure. This event put pressure on the men in the field, as most of the interviewers wanted to talk to the "local men" and not to those in the home office. It truly was an open door. The whole experience was a great reminder that this is God's work and that God has delegated to us the responsibility of doing His work.

Larry Salyer and Mr. Kilough then discussed various aspects of the recent editorial meetings in which 28 editors, writers and staff members participated. The managing editors were able to discuss critical goals in individual meetings with Mr. Salyer and Mr. Kilough. A decision was made to have more face-to-face meetings with the editors during the year.

Mr. Kilough commented that one of the great challenges the Church faces is preaching the gospel in this day and age. The part of our mission to “prepare a people” gives us a tightly focused audience in the Church, but the audience in the world is quite different as it is fractured into different groups, cultures, religions and educational levels.

Graemme Marshall, a pastor in Canada, had sent Mr. Kilough an article that discussed a “disease” that is spreading around the world—“Information Overload.” We are all affected by it. For instance, 40,000 new book titles come out each year, and 19.2 billion Web pages are found on the Yahoo index. Therefore, in preaching the gospel, we must focus on doing what we do best. There may be many interesting things to write about; but we have to always come back and make sure it all fits into the focus Jesus Christ has given in Mark 1:14-15. Christ gives us four important elements to consider: 1) The time is fulfilled. 2) The kingdom draws near. 3) Repent and 4) Believe the gospel. This scripture is universal—no one is excluded from this dictate—and each element truly contains good news. We have to stick to these points in Mark 1:14-15 and this must be the bottom line in our approach to preaching the gospel.

The *Good News* March/April 2008 print run was 545,425, but what we are most pleased with is that the U.S. subscriber list has climbed to 419,164. *Vertical Thought* continues to be very popular. Even though youth in the Church were the originally intended audience, 78 percent of the readership now is not associated with the Church. Some had wondered if the content should now be focused toward the world, but we decided that the focus remains on the youth of the Church and that any non-Church audience will just be “looking over their shoulders.”

In December 2007 a subscriber development letter was sent to just over 200,600 U.S. *Good News* subscribers offering them the *Bible Study Course*. In just a few weeks, we have received 14,666 responses, and they are still coming in. This is already over a 7.3 percent response, and should meet or exceed our previous efforts. The down side is that we see a drop-off rate after three lessons, which is quite high, so we are seriously discussing a rewrite of the *Bible Study Course*, including an interactive Web version.

As of the end of January, we have 150 *Beyond Today* TV programs, commentaries and commercials posted on the Google video Web site. In the first two years these programs have been viewed over 133,900 times. The most popular commentary is “Stopping the Addiction With Porn,” which has generated over 46,900 views. We also have 147 programs, commercials and commentaries available online at Yahoo’s video portal where they have been viewed 191,669 times since January of 2006—even more than at Google. The top video is a full half-hour program titled “The

Return of Jesus Christ,” with 5,276 views. The newest offerings come from YouTube and GodTube. YouTube, where we have been online since November 2006, has 146 video clips that have been viewed 170,586 times—now surpassing Google video. GodTube has given us 63,637 views of 102 video clips since March of 2007.

On another note, Mr. Kilough remarked that January 2008 was an all-time record month for incoming mail (76,327 pieces), and literature leaving our home office mailroom (72,212 pieces). As a result, six ABC students were hired to help out in the mail processing area on a part-time basis.

### **Financial Update**

Tom Kirkpatrick, treasurer, was unable to attend the meetings, so Mr. Kilough presented information about the financial condition of the Church. There have been no major changes since the December 2007 Council meetings. The February income was slightly up, but we are not tracking at this point to hit the 7 percent budgeted increase. As a result we are on pace to meet the operational budget this year, but not the \$1.5 million “set aside” for the relocation budget. However, this would be addressed later in this conference in a financial proposal.

### **Proposed Operation Plan and Budget for 2008-2009**

Discussion turned in the afternoon to the first draft of the proposed Operation Plan. We are on the front end of implementing a new tool for strategic planning, which will automatically lead to a different format for the Operation Plan, and undoubtedly will affect priority considerations in the budget. The Council of Elders traditionally spends considerable time at the February-March meetings going through several reviews and approval of what is presented to the GCE for final approval in May. What followed was a detailed walk-through of the first round of discussions.

Following are some of the items that were discussed and emphasized that are going to be considered as priorities during the next fiscal year:

#### Ministerial Services:

1. Continual program implementation of leadership training and development.
2. Three hires, and six to eight ministerial transfers.
3. Regional pastors to receive specialized training in conflict resolution.
4. Youth Corps programs to be ramped up.

#### Media:

1. Seek to hire more qualified writing staff.
2. Continue to upgrade the *Beyond Today* TV program.
3. Promote more of the one-minute video commentaries.
4. Design “first contact” booklets.
5. Solicit help from Web designers to improve our presence on the Web.
6. Explore the rewriting of the *Bible Study Course*.

7. Restart the Bible Reading Program, which is very popular among the members.

### **Proposed Budget**

Mr. Kilough presented a brief summary from Dr. Kirkpatrick in which the proposed budget will be \$24.5 million. It allows for a 5 percent COLA (cost of living allowance) for employees effective Jan. 1, 2009. The budget will allow for the hiring of three new pastors, plus it will include major increases to the international areas because of the decreased value of the American dollar.

Jason Lovelady, who is on the home office staff and assists the Council in strategic planning, was asked by Mr. Kilough to lead the Council through each of the line items in the proposed budget. Mr. Lovelady cited that this current year's fiscal budget was for \$25 million. The income is on track to reach \$23.5+ million this year, and depending on exactly where we end up this year, the proposed budget will be a 2 to 4 percent increase over the actuals of this year.

Roy Holladay asked if the cost center summary pages would be sent to the GCE in addition to the summary of the budget. Mr. Kilough stated that two years ago the cost summary pages were sent out in the call-and-notice packet, and if the Council so chooses, they can be sent out this year as well.

### **Executive Session**

The Council concluded the open session at 3 p.m. and went into executive session for the remainder of the afternoon.

John Foster  
*Council Reporter*

*-end-*

© 2008 United Church of God, *an International Association*