

Home Office Update July 10, 2003

Dear Brethren,

The fiscal year came to an end on June 30, which gives us an opportunity to examine the income and expenditure levels for the past 12 months. Overall, the news is good. Total income for the year was \$18,188,000. This was just slightly (less than one-half of 1 percent) under our budgeted projection of \$18,240,000. Our expenses were \$17,756,000—approximately 2.7 percent below budget. The bottom line is that our income exceeded our expenses by \$432,000. This money becomes a part of our operational reserves.

During its August meetings, the Council will discuss with the administration what appropriate level of reserves should be maintained, and if reserves exceed that level, how such reserves could be used to provide more funding for the preaching of the gospel and caring for the Church. As you can imagine, there are many important factors to be considered in such a discussion. We want to be the best possible stewards of the funds God has provided us through faithful brethren and contributors. Your continued prayers in all financial matters would be appreciated for God to show us His will and provide us with blessings, as He sees fit.

In the editorial report, Scott Ashley writes about an exciting development: the publishing of United's 30th booklet, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. That booklet is now at the printers and will be mailed out shortly to members, and it will be offered to hundreds of thousands of our subscribers. The timing almost could not be better, with continued unrest in the Middle East and more efforts to promote peace and stability in that area. Of course, we know—and this booklet discusses—that the only real peace will come through the direct intervention of Jesus Christ.

In the northern hemisphere, summer has certainly arrived and United Youth Camps are in full swing. Three camps (in Missouri, California and Alabama) have completed their sessions. As I write, the Teton Challenger Camp in Wyoming is underway. Later this summer, camps in Texas, Oregon and Pennsylvania will take place.

This year, four of our camps (Winter Camp in Wisconsin and summer camps in Missouri, Alabama and Wyoming) were scheduled for, and received visits from, the American Camping Association (ACA) as part of our three-year renewal process for accreditation of our entire camp program. I am pleased to report that all four of these camps received a score of 100 percent! That is a fantastic accomplishment and, according to the ACA, it is highly unusual for camps to receive a perfect score. If you would see the dozens of standards that need to be met, you would certainly see the excellence that our camps have attained and are recognized for. Our thanks and congratulations go to the entire camp team and the hundreds of volunteers who give of their time and effort for the benefit of our young people.

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit Camp Woodmen in Alabama. It was a delight to see campers and staff enjoying themselves—despite somewhat soggy conditions. Tropical storm Bill dumped several inches of rain on the camp before I arrived. Yet when I talked with the campers, they said those days were some of the most enjoyable. They had activities in the rain—including a rope pull through the mud! Don't you wish you could have been there? David Dobson, the Woodmen camp director, remarked that this was the best year yet for this camp. One could certainly witness not only the dedication of the staff, but the commitment of the campers as well to making camp a great educational and fun experience.

Here in the office we remain as busy as usual. The Ambassador Bible Center has about one month to go before concluding its year. The students have a number of activities planned, including a fund-raiser/dinner/variety show/bake sale this coming Sunday. The money will be donated to LifeNets, where it will be used to fund educational scholarships for young adults attending United in Central and South America.

ABC continues to have a steady stream of guest instructors, which is a nice addition for the students. Presently, Leon Walker is teaching the final module of the doctrines class. Gary Petty is also in town this week taping new programs for *Good News* radio. An update on these new radio programs is included in this report.

Finally, Cecil Maranhville shares with us some of the interesting letters that have been received in recent weeks. Many of these letters are inspiring, as people seek God's truth and a better relationship with Him.

Roy Holladay

Information Technology: Caribbean Web Site

The IT department was recently approached by Kingsley Mather, who coordinates the work in the Caribbean, to help create a Caribbean Web site. Since the hard part of choosing a design and color scheme had already been completed, our primary task involved fine-tuning the functionality of the site.

We were able to integrate our existing online order form and processing system directly into the Caribbean site's design. In addition, we were able to import our Bible Reading Program into the Caribbean layout. The utility that generates an image of past *Good News* issues was rewritten in addition to the navigation menu. Both utilities are now more in line with our programming standards.

Because the Caribbean is such a diverse and widespread region, Mr. Mather asked if we could generate maps for each island served. With the help of a digital atlas, we were able to meet this need; the images have all been optimized to minimize the amount of time needed to view them in a Web browser.

In an effort to keep the content of the site as current as possible and to lessen the demands on home office staff, Mr. Mather suggested we train an individual in the Caribbean to manage the Web site's content. Vincent Herbert, a member in the Virgin Islands, has agreed to take on this responsibility.

The Caribbean site offers information on local church contacts, Feast of Tabernacles location details, youth camp applications, as well as a literature library summary and order form. The URL for the Caribbean site is www.ucgcaribbean.org.

Paul Wasilkoff

Information Technology: Membership/Subscription System

The Canadian office recently installed the membership/subscription system suite of products that is used in the U.S. home office. UCIS (United Church Information System), which was designed and developed by UCG staff shortly after United started in 1995, was modified to allow it to run in areas outside the United States. It provides membership tracking, product fulfillment, *Good News* magazine and *Bible Study Course* fulfillment, donation tracking and receipting, tape fulfillment, high-speed envelope printing, barcode input and reporting capabilities, among other things.

We currently have a subset of the UCIS system running in the United Kingdom, the Philippines and Australia, and we are in the planning phase to install the system in at least one South American location.

Richard Kennebeck

Editorial Report

The July-August *Good News* has been printed and mailed, and most subscribers should have received it by now. The theme of the issue is "Can You Believe Bible Prophecy?" The print run for this issue was 460,167.

A new booklet, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, is at the printer and should be printed and mailed in mid-July. UCG members do not need to request a copy, as it will be mailed automatically to all U.S. member households.

Fifty thousand copies of the 32-page, magazine-size booklet are being printed. In addition to the UCG member households and international distribution, it is being offered to 200,000 *Good News* subscribers in a letter mailed this month. We expect 20,000 to 30,000 requests for the booklet from those readers.

This is the 30th booklet UCG has published and our fifth major booklet on prophecy. The booklet should prove to be very popular since the Middle East regularly makes the headlines around the world. It is also being offered as the featured booklet in the July-August issue of *The Good News*.

The booklet was written primarily by editorial writer and Lansing, Michigan, pastor Melvin Rhodes and gives an overview of prophecies of the region and its peoples back to Abraham's time. It describes the historical fulfillment of many prophecies, showing that the Bible is absolutely accurate and trustworthy. It also goes into the history of Islam and the roots of the current conflict between the Arab world and Israel and its supporters.

We appreciate the faithfulness and generosity of the members and donors that make these efforts possible. You can view a copy on the Web at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Scott Ashley

Good News Gift Copy Project Test Results

It has now been 10 months since we initiated the *Good News* Gift Copy Test Project in 39 U.S. congregations. (We wanted to wait a significant amount of time to capture as many responses as possible.) If you recall, in this test over 8,000 gift copy insert cards were provided to the brethren in certain U.S. congregations. The volunteers then filled in the names and addresses of individuals to whom they wanted a single gift copy of *The Good News* sent. These cards were then gathered together and sent to the home office for processing. Gift copies of *The Good News* were then mailed to each of these potential subscribers. After reviewing their own personal gift copy, those individuals would then decide if they wanted to receive a free 12-issue subscription by detaching and mailing in a card.

In analyzing the results and comparing response statistics of the test inserts received, compared to two previous inserts (called "controls"), we found that there was no significant increase in response above the regular average response. Although, due to member involvement, we did actually mail out a larger quantity of gift copies than we normally do, the actual number of responses received from interested subscribers was not appreciably better than the normal response. Therefore as a result, an expansion of the project to other congregations will not take place.

Although we are somewhat disappointed in the results of the test, it does prove the value of careful testing and patience when it comes to various subscription-generating projects and programs. Our special thanks goes to the pastors and the brethren who participated in the test.

John LaBissoniere

Good News Radio

Gary Petty is in the home office this week to tape several new radio programs with United ministers as guests. Below are the titles, guests and subjects for each program.

- "Freedom Is Baffling" with John Elliott—true freedom comes from God's laws and changing the inner person.
- "In Search of a Just God" with Tom Kirkpatrick—all human beings suffer God's temporary judgments, but await the future eternal judgment.
- "In the Image of God" with John Cafourek and Gary Antion—human beings are made in the image of God, yet we have become terribly flawed. God has a plan for our restoration.
- "Is There a Devil?" with Steve Myers—there is a real Satan and he is the author of evil.
- "Old Europe, New Europe" with Tom Kirkpatrick—the Bible prophesies the rise of an end-time European power.
- "Worship Wars" with Ed Smith—with all the hoopla about styles of worship and music, are Christians missing the bigger picture of observing the Sabbath?

At the end of the month of June, we purchased some new audio editing software from Digidesign (a division of Avid Technology, Inc.) that enables us to record, edit and master all of our radio programs right in the radio studio, without tying up time on the Avid Media Composer video editing system in the adjacent room, as we had

been doing up until this point. For a full schedule of upcoming programs, please visit our Web site at www.ucg.org/radio.

Peter Eddington

Personal Correspondence

Our total number of letters answered for June was 95, with another 78 handled by the E-mail team. We had considerable variety in this month's letters. A former Black Muslim, now a Protestant preacher in prison, asked us for employment and financial help. Another prisoner (not on file) says he's inherited gold ore and will give the Church big bucks; he wants our help with the legal details. Still another prisoner asks us to contact his Protestant church congregation to get the local members to visit him. A subscriber asks if snake handling is a normal practice in the Church of God in light of Mark 16:17-18. Another subscriber appeals to us to help him tell the story of the plight of hillbillies.

On a different note, a coworker writes of his disappointment that his workplace discontinued Internet access, so he can't continue reading the study papers on our Web site; we offered to mail him hard copies of studies that interest him, as well as suggesting that he see if his local library offers free Web access. Another astute reader noticed that we don't use the symbol of a cross in our publications and asks why.

We handled several responses to Jerry Aust's article on heaven in the May-June issue of *The Good News*. One of the responders asked how, in light of our beliefs, we would explain her experiences with her husband's deceased grandfather. She added: "I fear you may inadvertently confuse a Christian to the point of straying from his faith."

We had three requests from people representing groups. One lady asked for study books on Ezekiel on behalf of the leader of her Bible study group. A man representing a group in Southern California that keeps the Holy Days (not a Church of God organization) asked for information about the Escondido Feast site. A prisoner requests information on becoming a member, would like to meet with a minister and says that he has a group of Sabbath keepers. Because he is new on our files, we began a dialogue through PCD on these matters before sending his request to a minister.

In the category of repeat topics, we had three letters on where Cain got his wife; three on various topics about women (serving as elders, wearing pants, appropriate hair length, makeup and jewelry use); two requests for information on fasting; two for a halfway house for released prisoners; two questions on homosexuality; and two on the identity of the two witnesses. And, we had a variety of four on converting others: one from a prisoner who is pressing others hard; one from a Kenyan (not on our file) wanting advice on preaching to others; two from wives who want help in converting their husbands. One of those wives wanted our help in convincing her husband to attend the local Protestant church with her!

On a sobering note, two prisoners wrote about self-defense, one explaining that he had to often defend himself against rape and extortion. On a related issue, we are corresponding with a chaplain in the Texas Department of Justice to secure the right for prisoners to receive anointed cloths. They aren't currently on the approved list of items that prisoners in the TDOJ can receive. Because we have both members and prospective members in prison, we would appreciate people's prayers on this issue.

Cecil Maranville