

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter from the President January 29, 2004

Dear Brethren,

Few sporting events generate more excitement than a closely contested relay race. Occasionally, a great relay team is disqualified because they fail to pass the baton correctly. The U.S. men's 4 x 100 relay team has been highly respected for dominating the Olympic gold medal for this event. Notice a quote from an article in the *Washington Post* from 1996. Prior to 1996, "the U.S. men never have settled for silver or bronze in the history of the Olympics. It has been gold or bust; the United States has won 14 of the 18 events that have been contested. In 1912, 1960, and 1988 the United States was disqualified." The Canadian 4 x 100 relay team won world gold in 1995 and 1997 and again at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. Yet, in 1999 the Canadian men's team saw its hopes for a third straight world title obliterated for passing the baton out of the zone at the world track and field championships.

These examples illustrate the importance of properly passing the baton to your next teammate. We are presently in the process of conducting 15 one-day ministerial conferences for the U.S. ministry. The theme of these meetings is "*Passing the Baton.*"

The Church recognizes its responsibility to pass on to the next generation the mantle of leadership and Christian values. This duty was acknowledged when the Ambassador Bible Center was first established. The mission of ABC is "to convey to those who are interested, and especially to *the next generation* of young people in the Church of God, the precious truths of God as found in the Bible . . ."

This latest round of ministerial meetings is focusing on how to recognize and help to develop the next generation of leaders in the Church. This has always been the task of the Church through all generations. As one generation of the Church ages and dies, it is imperative that the next generation is prepared to assume leadership—at all levels in the Body of Christ. To help facilitate this process, the ministry is being encouraged and instructed in the mentoring process. However, we realize the success of this initiative will depend upon all of us helping to mentor the next generation of leaders. Titus 2:4 illustrates what we are encouraging when it states that the older generation of women ought to teach the younger generation in family skills and values.

Biblically, "passing the baton" begins at the earliest ages, and it begins in the family. Notice Deuteronomy 6:6-9: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Why was this to be done? For two main reasons: First, so that Israel would continue to be a godly nation. What a person learns in his youth, he is not likely to easily forget. Second, so that these individuals would develop a personal relationship with God and attain godly character.

Of course, we know that Israel was far from a godly nation for much of its history. Why? “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judges 2:10-11). The new generation had not been taught about God, nor did they come to *know* God. It is imperative that we mentor future generations in both, and it starts with the families. Ephesians 6:4 admonishes us parents to rear our children in the instruction and guidance of God. There is no more important aspect of providing for our children than to raise them in a godly household, directing them to a personal relationship with our Father and Jesus Christ.

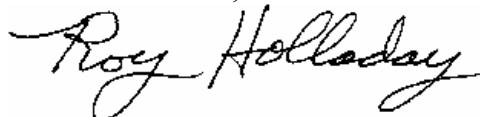
Once a firm foundation and a solid core has been established in the hearts of our youth, we then need to focus on mentoring them to a more mature, deeper relationship with God and understanding of His Word. It also means providing them with leadership opportunities in the congregations, in our programs (like United Youth Camps where dozens of volunteer staff serve every year), at Feast sites, etc. We learn best by doing, and we also learn best by teaching ourselves. Notice what Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Timothy was told to teach faithful men, who would in turn teach other faithful men, who would in turn . . . well, you get the point. In Israel also the priests and Levites would train their sons for their future roles as priests and in serving God. There are indications that Samuel, Elijah and maybe others were active in educating new spiritual leaders.

We are working hard at trying to find the most effective methods and activities to be continually “passing the baton” of the truth of God. All of us must be committed to going forward in this regard. One area of focus right now is training local people for leadership in the congregations. We need people who can actively lead in a godly manner. We need Sabbath school teachers, activity coordinators, crew leaders, deacons, elders, etc. We are excited about the possibilities in this area, and look forward to more in the months and years ahead.

Leadership cannot be developed in a vacuum, nor is it learned at a desk. No one learns leadership, wisdom or other such skills by having all decisions made for him. It requires opportunity to plan, consult, make decisions and, yes, make mistakes. Our discussions about passing the baton have focused on such opportunities for involvement. In the past few years, our young people especially have asked for more chances for involvement in the congregation and the Church. We welcome that. We welcome the initiative and energy our brethren provide—and their level of expertise. This is all part of being a member of the Body of Christ: “Every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

In reality, is this not also what God is doing with us—training us so He can pass along a larger baton of leadership to us in the Kingdom of God, so we can, in turn, guide and mentor others?

In Christ’s service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roy Holladay