



United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter from the President February 10, 2005

Dear Brethren,

Celebrating weddings, anniversaries, graduations from school, promotions, baptisms or other significant accomplishments and events are some of the most joyous occasions in our lives. Often, such activities are planned with great anticipation as we share our happiness with others. We discuss what the future will hold and what will come next. We come away from these events even more motivated to continue “onward and upward.” It is also a time to reflect back on the blessings we have received, thanking God and friends for their help along the way.

This coming spring, we will have something to celebrate: the 10th anniversary of the United Church of God! There has been a lot of hard work accomplished in order to reach this point—and there is much to be grateful for and to talk about. Brethren have labored together to build a spiritual home where we can worship God according to biblical beliefs, where we can preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and where we can provide opportunities and education for the next generation. This special event gives us the chance to reflect on where we have been, to remember God’s blessings and to rededicate ourselves collectively to working together to fulfill His will.

As we well remember, such a peaceful and biblical focus was nearly impossible 10 years ago. During that time, chaos and emotional turmoil were daily fare for many of us. Cherished beliefs and traditions were being cast aside—supplanted by long-abandoned theological error. To a certain extent, events a decade ago seemed to at least partially parallel Church events during the first century following Christ’s resurrection.

When Christ didn’t return immediately in the first century as many hoped, history records that some early leaders grew weary of a prophetic ministry that focused on the coming Kingdom of God. Perhaps thinking, “My master is delaying his coming” (Matthew 24:48), they began substituting political and cultural correctness for biblical truth. Then, just as 10 years ago, a sound focus on the future Kingdom of God—which included the royal law that defines sin and the Sabbath that Jesus Himself kept—was discarded. As we look back 10 years, we can personally empathize with the second century Christians at Smyrna. What thoughts, we can wonder, ran through their minds when Ignatius and other leaders demanded that they desert biblical Sabbath worship and instead embrace an artificial time on the first day of the week?

Most importantly to us, a decade ago thousands said “no” to these changes. Humbled, shaken and earnestly seeking God’s will, hundreds of ordained men and their spouses assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, in late April and early May of 1995 for a new beginning. As we reflect back, it’s important to remember that in Indianapolis there was no step-by-step organizational manual—there was no road map to cleverly reconcile multiple thousands of converted brethren whose trust and faith had been shattered. There were just people intensely praying for and seeking God’s will, trying to do the best they could. Personalities were irrelevant. Preserving and sustaining biblical truth was paramount.

While the events leading up to Indianapolis sobered us, the days and weeks afterwards were filled with excitement, anticipation, much planning, long hours of work—and much rejoicing at our new beginning! There were congregations to provide for, the Feast of Tabernacles to plan, youth camps starting during the summer and

literature to produce. People commented that they were “on fire” about God’s Word and God’s work as perhaps they had not been for many years. The atmosphere was motivational and inspiring.

Where have we come in the past 10 years? The United Church of God began first and foremost because of a deep desire and conviction to obey God through following the traditional beliefs that we read in the Bible. Nothing has changed in this regard—our commitment to this is as strong as ever. The three initial mandates that came out of the Indianapolis conference were as follows: 1) stabilize and care for local congregations, 2) observe the Holy Days and establish sites for the Feast of Tabernacles and 3) preach the gospel. God led us to a different organizational system of governance from what we had in the past—both to protect our doctrines and to maximize the efforts of all members in the work of the Church. These objectives and much more have been accomplished since that first year of our existence, and they continue to be core, foundational mandates in our work.

In those 10 years since, with God’s help, we have made some great strides. And on occasion, due to human weakness, we have stumbled. As an organization we’ve helped many thousands, but sometimes individuals have been hurt. We must always—personally and corporately—take responsibility for our errors. Speaking on behalf of the United Church of God, I sincerely extend our apologies to anyone who has been hurt along the way, no matter how inadvertent that hurt may have been. As we look toward the next 10 years, it is certainly our Christian duty to examine those areas, repent, change and then move forward in an improved manner. I am personally confident that we can do this, with God’s help, remembering the lessons we review each year during the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, thanking Him for His patience and forgiveness.

I find it motivational to look back to where we started and compare it to where we are today. We give God the glory and honor for the many blessings we have received and acknowledge that our strength comes only through obedience to Him in following the lead of the Holy Spirit. The Bible encourages us to “know the state of your flocks” (Proverbs 27:23), and that applies spiritually as well. Perhaps considering our past will help us to know how we need to move forward. Below are some facts and figures about the last 10 years for us to consider:

- In 1995 the first Holy Day we observed as an organization was the Feast of Pentecost with a U.S. attendance of 11,726. That same year, we had 27 Feast of Tabernacles sites around the world, and approximately 17,458 in attendance. In 2004 we had 55 Feast sites and 20,487 in attendance.
- In 1995 we started with two publications—*New Beginnings* (which became *United News*) and *The Good News* magazine. Currently we have six regular periodicals (*Good News*, *United News*, *World News and Prophecy*, *Vertical Thought*, *Virtual Christian Magazine* and *Ministerial Quarterly*), 31 booklet titles, 21 reprint articles, a sermon tape program, six official Web sites and various other publications.
- In 1995 we had just over 400 elders serving the brethren. In 2005 we have almost 450.
- Currently we have approximately 92 pastors, associate pastors and assistant pastors serving 217 congregations in the United States. We have approximately 45 other employed ministers serving more than 150 congregations, video groups and Bible study groups in countries outside the United States. (Accurate figures for 1995 are unavailable, since ministers and congregations joined United on a consistent basis throughout the last half of the year.)
- Starting from nothing, in cramped rented office space in Arcadia, California, we now own the building that houses our home office in Cincinnati, with administrative, media and mailing operations. It is also the home for the Ambassador Bible Center and the Cincinnati East congregation. There is room for growth, and we have needed to take advantage of that already.
- We are now in our sixth year of offering a postsecondary, seven-month intensive program in the study of the Bible at the Ambassador Bible Center. So far, approximately 200 students have been provided a thorough foundation in the Bible, better equipping them to serve in congregations and in the work of the Church. In addition, hundreds of brethren have participated in ABC samplers and mini-samplers across the United States and in other countries. We anticipate ABC continuing to have a positive impact!
- United sponsors two cable-access television programs that are locally produced by elders and brethren—*Tomorrow* and *Good News Television*. *Good News Radio* is a third vehicle by which the gospel goes onto the airwaves. Once the new media center is finished, our capabilities in these areas will be enhanced.
- Thousands of young people (as well as adult staff) have participated in our youth camp program, which now includes eight summer and winter teen camps, and seven regional preteen camps in the United

States, plus several more internationally. Additionally, there are dozens of local and regional activities every year.

- Perhaps for the first time ever, the Church offers its employees a formal, comprehensive retirement program in which both employees and the Church participate.
- United conducts a Leadership Training Program to prepare men and women for greater roles of service in the local congregation—including possibly some for the full-time ministry.

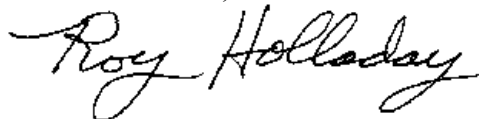
A great deal remains to be done, yet we should also be encouraged about where we are. We have spent a decade in solidifying our resources. Now we possess the opportunity to use those proven resources to do much more in the future! Allow me to offer my personal perspectives on a few of the opportunities that lie before us:

- With our current and tested mix of literature, Web sites, broadcast tools and the new media center (now beginning construction), a large open door stands before us. We possess a singular opportunity—bereft of the challenges and the baggage of the past—to *truly increase the awareness and understanding* of the Church's *unique message*. We have taken a number of steps to better capture this opportunity in the past few months, and I believe it will bear good fruit.
- United owes its origin to two critical objectives: to both preserve and to practice core beliefs reflected directly from the Bible. I believe we have achieved that, and have done it well. Given this fact, I believe that we must ensure—more than ever—that we are actively *growing* “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). In Hebrews we read that we should be able to partake of the “meat” of the Word, not “milk” only. If Christ were to return today, would we be ready to meet Him, prepared to serve upon His return? Clearly we have done much in preserving and teaching biblical truth and doctrine. But as we need to raise the bar higher, let us do it and let us do it *now*.
- In a lawless age where events and changes batter us in an unrelenting onslaught, we cannot afford to let love “grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). We certainly cannot permit such a tragedy to occur because of our own actions or inaction. The Council of Elders concluded a number of years ago that “we have not always treated one another in a godly manner.” Hopefully we will all work to resolve that with urgency. I think we all firmly believe that with greater submission to our Father, we can achieve greater success here.

Evaluating both the positives and negatives of our first 10 years will be an important process in the weeks and months to come. As the ministry gathers for the 2005 Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Elders in May, their focus will be on topics mentioned here and other related subjects. The theme for this year's meeting is “Seize the Vision: The Next Decade and Beyond.” It should be a wonderful opportunity to review where we have been and, more importantly, to discuss moving forward. Your prayers for God's insight will certainly be appreciated.

We have much to be thankful for collectively and individually. We also have room for growth before we reach the “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [full-grown] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). As we approach our 10th anniversary—and more importantly, as we approach the Passover season—let us give diligent attention to where we have been and to where we need to go. As ancient Israel and New Testament Christians have done throughout the centuries, let us rededicate ourselves to God the Father, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

In Christ's service,



Roy Holladay