

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy O. Holladay
President

Letter From the Chairman May 30, 2003

Dear Brethren, and especially all of our young people,

With the onset of 100-degree temperatures hitting northern California, we've had a sudden introduction to summer here! As always, the summer calendar is full of church activities, dominated by our summer camps. Thousands of parents, teens, preteens, ministers and adult volunteers—young and old alike—are now, at least in the northern hemisphere, making plans for the camps that start over the next few weeks and months. This letter is especially for the young people, but if you are not a youth, please don't stop reading! The issues addressed here are ones with which we must all identify.

When we consider the time, money and effort that goes into summer camps, the most important question we must ask is: What does our camp program have to do with the Kingdom of God?

I raise the question because recently we have been planning the Feast of Tabernacles video, and the Kingdom of God theme is heavily on my mind. The Kingdom is not merely the focus of the Feast, though—it should be our focus every day of our lives! We should scrutinize everything we do in light of the Kingdom of God, and if our plans do not ultimately align with our goal of being in God's Kingdom, or the principles that will govern that Kingdom, why should we waste our time on those things?

The Kingdom of God therefore has to be the primary focus of our camp program. Indeed, we believe it has been one of our most effective tools for helping put, or keep, young people on the road of life according to God's Word and His way, and that road leads to His Kingdom.

Please consider Jesus' instruction, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). At what age do you think He intends for us to start applying that instruction? At what point in life should you begin sincerely praying, "Your kingdom come," according to the model that Jesus outlined earlier in that same chapter? The answer is, the younger the better! As soon as children begin to have any degree of comprehension, it is imperative that parents begin placing a vision of the Kingdom of God in the forefront of their minds. Why? Because the Kingdom of God is their destiny. It is critically important to instill within our children—within every young person in the Church—a sense of their destiny, because a clear sense of destiny will help them immensely in determining their behavior.

So what does camp have to do with you and the Kingdom of God? It is one of our prime opportunities to physically bring you out of the world's social environment and place you in a godly social environment. There you can more clearly see the way to the Kingdom of God. Camp plays a part in helping you win the war. We are all in a battle for our hearts and minds, and Satan will do anything he can to divert our attention, thoughts and behaviors away from God's Kingdom. He will work hard to pull you toward the world's values, and that will lead you to sin, and that will damage your character. Satan's goal is to damage your character sufficiently in hopes that you will reject God's calling. Our goal is to help you accept God's calling.

In 1996, the camp directors developed a phrase to describe the environment that is more conducive to God influencing your life. They called it "the Zone." Webster's dictionary defines a zone as "an area that differs in some respect, or is distinguished for some purpose, from adjoining areas, or within which distinctive circumstances exist or are established." Our goal is to create in camp an atmosphere very different from the world you live in most of the year. We try hard to construct a well-balanced environment where you tackle challenges

and achieve success, where you have fun without regrets, where you learn the value of supporting and including each other, where you learn the importance of structure in life and, most importantly, where you build positive relationships with God and each other.

Brethren, aren't these elements of "the Zone" the same ones we should create in our families, in our local congregations and in the Church of God? Don't these elements essentially describe what the Kingdom of God will be like? In the Kingdom Jesus Christ will create a "Zone" in a far better way than anything we can produce today, and in that environment God will change millions of lives! People's lives are not being changed in today's world except for the worse, but for you children and teens, your lives can be different. We want you to see that God's way works, whether it is in the future, when Christ returns, or now at camp, at school, on the job or in your future marriages—wherever and whenever.

God has given us precious knowledge of how to capture the core values of His future Kingdom even today in our own lives. As Paul wrote to the young minister Timothy, "Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Notice, God's way has promise *of the life that now is* as well as for later in His Kingdom. Our greatest goal for summer camp is that you will leave with a clear picture that godliness has a twofold reward—it pays off in a better life for you now, as it leads you to the greatest life in the Kingdom of God. Godliness puts you in a position to be blessed.

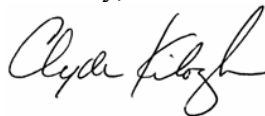
I don't know about you, but I treasure the rare opportunities to physically isolate myself from the world away from all its negativity. My mind always finds a better place to be when those things are out of sight. That's one reason the Feast of Tabernacles is such a blessing for all of us. On top of that, United Youth Camp is an additional great blessing for our youth. The greatest blessing of all lies in getting away from the world for a few days, and comparing and contrasting its ways with God's. In such an atmosphere of emotional and spiritual stability, friendliness and enjoyment, your mind finds a better place to sort through the issues of life. A better environment means better thinking; better thinking means better choices.

We want to help you connect the causes to the effects, to see that the positive camp environment isn't a result of activities, but a result of godliness. It does not happen accidentally; it happens because your parents and other caring adults chose to follow God. And even when things go wrong at camp, especially between people, the same basic lesson always holds true—God's way works; any other way doesn't.

We love and value you young people very much and earnestly want to see you succeed in all you do. Please join with us in preparing, not only physically but also spiritually, to have a successful camp. The greatest success will be in learning more about loving God and His way, seeking His Kingdom more than ever and committing to live by the standards of His Kingdom.

For those of you in the southern hemisphere, you may have winter coming on, and summer camp memories may be months behind, but keep these thoughts in mind. The camp experience may be only one week, but the lesson is eternal: Commit to following God, and you will not only be on the road to God's Kingdom, but the path you walk between now and then will make your life so much better.

Sincerely, in Christ's service,



Clyde Kilough