

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
August 14, 2003 -- Cincinnati OH

Much was accomplished in the final half-day of meetings, including an update on the supplemental hymnal project, a discussion concerning whether applause for special music at the Feast of Tabernacles is appropriate, a modification to ministerial expense policy, the establishing of a local congregation-based emergency assistance program, and the finalization of the Church's financial reserves policy. Once again, Council member Doug Horchak was not present due to a trip to Ghana.

Correction

The Council report on August 12, 2003 erroneously stated that Kambini Banda had been hired to serve in Nigeria. Mr. Banda will be serving in Zambia.

Supplemental Hymnal Project

Steve Myers reported to the Council on the status of the project. Mr. Myers is coordinates the effort of the team, which also includes Dan Anderson, Jim Brandenburg, Mark Graham, David Hoover and Janel Johnson.

The committee sorted through more than 500 hymns, many of which are original compositions submitted by Church members, to arrive at the 65 that will be included in the hymnal. Recognizing that there are many sensitivities and expectations regarding hymn selection, the committee established a set of criteria by which each potential selection was judged:

1. God's inspiration

- We need God's Spirit guiding us through this process
- The purpose of hymns is to praise God and edify His people

2. Text

- Must be doctrinally accurate
- Of high literary and poetic merit
 - Is there a poetic nature to this hymn?
 - Is the message of the text clear?
 - Has the composer compromised for the sake of rhyme?
 - Words and phrases should not be overly archaic
 - Is there a balance between repetition and variety?
 - Avoid "self-absorbed" themes

3. Musical quality

- A quality melody
- Memorable
- "Sing-able"
- Flowing with natural accents

- Harmonious vocal parts
- Overall musical character
- Beauty
 - Uplifting – praising the power of God
 - Stirring
 - Lively
 - Rhythmic balance involving repetition and variety

4. Musical accuracy

- No errors in music theory
 - Proper voice leading in melody and accompaniment
 - Sound theoretical progressions
 - Correct key and harmonic progression
 - Proper harmonic resolution
 - Written in the proper vocal range

5. Suitability

- Is this hymn intended for congregational choral-style singing?
 - Level of difficulty
 - Uncomplicated to direct
 - Uncomplicated to play
 - Uncomplicated to sing
 - Length
 - Compatibility of text and music
 - Do they compliment each other?
 - Is the sum greater than the parts?
 - Will it be overly offensive; i.e., too “Protestant?”
 - Original or duplication?
 - Does it provide something we don’t have already?
 - Inspiring lyrics or excellent music giving new life to old words
 - Overall quality
 - Would this hymn be worthy of inclusion in any hymnal?

The supplemental hymnal will include nine additional hymns written by Dwight Armstrong, 33 hymns which are in the public domain, 19 new compositions (written by eight United Church of God members) and four hymns for which the Church will have to pay royalties.

The Council reviewed a mock-up of the supplement. It will be the same page size and have the same binding as the current hymnal, but with a different colored cover. In order to help pianists and song leaders prepare, efforts will be made to provide them with a copy of the hymnal and a computer-generated accompaniment compact disk before the Feast.

By resolution the Council unanimously approved the printing of the supplemental hymnal.

Applause for Special Music at the Feast

Jim Franks moderated a discussion on the subject of applause for special music at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Church's current policy dates to 1996. Based on that policy, each year an announcement is printed in the Festival Brochures reminding the brethren that applause is inappropriate for sermonettes, sermons or special music, with the exception of the children's choir. It is appropriate to applaud for special announcements (healings, dramatic developments in the Work, etc.)

Mr. Franks commented that correspondence he has received from members on this subject was evenly divided between those in favor of and those opposed to applause for special music at the Feast. He surveyed the Church pastors and of the 45 who responded, 29 felt applause for special music was inappropriate (therefore keeping the policy as is), 12 were in favor of removing the policy and four had no opinion. Mr. Franks read comments from members and pastors on both sides of the question.

Ministers and members who were in favor of applause said that it shows the congregation's appreciation for the message of the music and is a way of joining the performer in praising God; the applause isn't based on the entertainment value of the performance. They stated there is no scripture that says it is wrong to applaud and that denying it squelches the joy and inspiration it is intended to express.

Those not in favor said that it is inappropriate due to the holiness of the service; applause is appropriate for entertainment, but not for worship. The music is offered to God, not for the purpose of being applauded. We can show our appreciation individually and personally, rather than through applause. Experience shows that one difficulty with allowing applause is that a performance that isn't quite as uplifting or stirring generates "polite applause," which is embarrassing to the performer because it indicates that the effort was below par. If applause is allowed as a means of showing appreciation, where does it stop? Should we applaud an inspiring sermonette? Sermon? Opening or closing prayer?

- Aaron Dean commented that we don't know exactly how the early New Testament Church conducted its services. We can't turn to scripture to absolutely prove whether or not applause is appropriate. When Christ returns He can let us know exactly what He wants. In the meantime, the Church will make the best decision it can and while some will be disappointed regardless of the decision, we appreciate the members' cooperation.
- Victor Kubik suggested that whatever the decision is, it needs to be made for good reason and needs to be explained to the Church. We should produce articles or maybe even a study paper to explain to and educate the membership about what a worship church service is and how it differs from a concert.
- Clyde Kilough stated that his opinion is also that we should not have applause for the special music because the service is for worshipping God, not for entertainment. He emphasized that the Council needs to acknowledge that there are different ways to

look at the matter and explain the policy decision it makes. In fact, the explanation will probably be more important than the policy itself.

- Tony Wasilkoff pointed out that society is drifting from solemnity to celebration. In most churches, worship services are becoming more expression and celebration and include less genuine worship. He reminded that not too long ago the Church allowed applause for special music and it turned into kind of a rating system; light applause was more embarrassing than none at all. He suggested that the policy be maintained as it is, but with an explanation as to why we have the policy.
- Richard Thompson said that special music performers have told him when applause was allowed they were almost tempted to choose music that was more likely to elicit applause as opposed to a solemn piece of music that might be meaningful but not as emotionally stirring. Those special music performers who had spoken to him said they appreciated the no-applause policy.
- Mr. Kubik commented that music performed in our services needs to be truly worshipful and appropriate, even if wouldn't necessarily evoke applause. Music sung in the temple was very carefully chosen from the psalms and totally focused on God.
- Mario Seiglie said he prefers leaving the policy as it is. He voiced that children are in a different category; applause for them is a way of encouraging them and he was comfortable allowing that to continue.
- Mr. Kilough emphasized the need for consistency. We can teach our children, too, that there is a difference between entertainment and a worship service. At what point do we stop applauding for children who perform special music? Do we applaud for 12-year olds but stop applauding when they turn 13?
- Mr. Wasilkoff said that since applause isn't a matter of absolute right or wrong, we could continue to applaud our children's special music efforts. They're in a different category. When they sing, they perform lighter songs and in the congregations' eyes can do no wrong.
- Joel Meeker commented that one reason to avoid applause in general is to prevent it from becoming a "rating system." But that's not the case with the children's choir at the Feast.

Mr. Franks polled the Council to determine if there was enough support to change the policy. There was not, so the current policy will stand. He did, however, emphasize the importance of communicating to the Church why the Council has made this decision and encouraged ministerial services to provide a letter or one or more articles to explain the reasoning behind the policy.

Ministerial Expense for Regional Activities

Richard Pinelli presented to the Council a new policy that would allow pastors to be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the course of their pastoral duties and responsibilities at regional activities. The policy includes a description of the process by which expenses can be planned, estimated and ultimately reimbursed. It will be included in the ministerial expense budgeting process starting with the 2004-2005 fiscal year. The Council unanimously passed a consent without resolution approving the policy.

Good Works Program

The Council continued discussion of the proposal made by Roy Holladay to establish a mechanism by which local congregations, through contributions and fund raising activities, would be able to help provide financial assistance in the event of an emergency that affects Church membership but falls outside of the Church's budget.

The fund would primarily be for use in international areas, but the Council changed the wording of the proposed resolution to allow it to be used in the event of an emergency within the United States, as well.

The Council unanimously passed a resolution to establish the program. The resolution names Tom Kirkpatrick as the coordinator of the fund. He will be responsible for communicating with ministry and administrative personnel to establish needs and for coordinating the efforts of the congregations that wish to participate. He will also account for and administer the funds.

Cash Reserves Policy

Mr. Dean presented the Council with a proposed resolution written by Dr. Kirkpatrick to establish the Church's cash reserve policy. As decided in the meeting on Tuesday, August 12, the resolution states that the Church will manage the financial affairs of the Church with the intent to maintain "a minimum of ten weeks cash reserves (cash and near cash balances, exclusive of amounts designated by the Council for retirement), i.e., 19.23% of the operating budget of that year..." The resolution also describes the options the Council would have if there is a budget surplus for a fiscal year.

The Council unanimously passed the resolution establishing the cash reserves policy.

Upcoming meetings

Mr. Kilough confirmed the dates for the next Council of Elders face-to-face meetings. The committees will meet December 2-3, 2003. The Council meetings will take place December 4-10.

The following face-to-face meetings were also tentatively scheduled. The committees will meet on February 23-24, 2004. The meetings will take place February 25-March 2.

The Council of Elders session adjourned at 12:00 noon.

-Don Henson

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