

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
Teleconference – February 5, 2004

The Council of Elders met via teleconference to discuss a number of matters regarding plans for the 2004 General Conference of Elders. All Council members participated except for Joel Meeker, who was traveling. David Register, chairman of the 2004 GCE Advisory Task Force, also took part in the meeting.

Plans for the 2004 General Conference of Elders

In the December meetings the Council considered recommendations made by the 2004 GCE Advisory Task Force. The purpose of the discussion today was to seek Council approval in areas that had been remanded back to them for further refinement. Prior to today's meeting Mr. Register provided each Council member with proposals for:

- a format for a question and answer session to discuss amendments prior to balloting,
- a format for the question and answer session with the Council of elders, and
- a summary of workshops and lectures to be offered at the conference.

All of the Council members agreed on the importance of open discussions to help elders understand the issues, as well as the purposes and impact of proposed amendments. They also agreed that care must be taken to prevent politicizing or arguing for one side or the other on an issue. During the lengthy discussion, different opinions were expressed and suggestions offered as to how that could be accomplished. In the end, the Council unanimously agreed on a resolution providing for a workshop session on Saturday night during the conference (May 1) for the purpose of giving information and answering questions regarding all ballot issues (except Council nominees) prior to the ballot on Sunday, May 2.

The GCE planning task force was assigned the responsibility of returning a proposal for the workshop format to the Council by March 1, 2004.

Discussion on ballot issue question and answer session

Leon Walker pointed out that the primary concern is that there be an "even playing field." About half of the elders would be at a disadvantage because they vote via absentee ballot and would not be able to participate in a discussion of the issues at the conference. Their votes may be based on less information and they would not be able to change their votes based on the discussions. He commented that a cybercast of the discussion would not be helpful since elders not attending would have mailed their ballots prior to the conference. Mr. Walker suggested that open discussion is important and valuable and that it could be accomplished over the Elders Forum prior to the conference. He also urged that those with specific questions contact the author of the amendment.

Doug Horchak agreed that discussion of the issues is important and that the Elders Forum could be used more extensively. He suggested that dates could be established on which specific amendments would be discussed on the forum.

Richard Thompson commented that there is plenty of time before the general conference for discussion of the amendments by use of the Elders Forum, email or telephone. He emphasized that elders are responsible to “do their homework” so they’re prepared when they come to the conference.

Aaron Dean expressed his view that a discussion would provide more information, which protects all of the general conference – even if not all the elders are present at the annual meeting.

Mario Seiglie pointed out that there can never be a completely “even playing field” since there will always be some who have more information than others. He gave the example of Spanish-speaking elders who have learned to ask around and check with others to gather the information they need. Mr. Seiglie said that if he were not able to participate in discussions at the conference, he would be happy for those who could.

Victor Kubik emphasized that more communication is better when it is done in a proper attitude or spirit. He pointed out that there is a synergy in a group discussion that may bring more information to light and that can’t be duplicated on the Elders Forum.

Tony Wasilkoff agreed that most of the preparation for voting should be accomplished well before the conference through the Elders Forum, email and telephone calls but that a Q & A discussion of the ballot issues would still be helpful. Mr. Wasilkoff acknowledged the concern that discussions not become politicized – but expressed that that should not occur if all are in a right attitude. He suggested that there be an open discussion at this year’s conference and, based on how well it goes, the Council can decide whether to do so in the future.

Jim Franks said he favors discussing the amendments, but was somewhat confused by the process proposed by the task force. He expressed that the discussion should not be based on emotion or become a point/counterpoint debate. He favored a workshop approach designed to provide information in a neutral manner.

Robert Dick agreed, emphasizing the importance of providing information but that the forum not be used to campaign for one side or the other of an issue.

Mr. Walker also agreed, emphasizing the value of explaining the impact of an amendment – especially since sometimes the proposed changes are technical in nature. He said that the approach should be educational, not an effort to influence how someone will vote.

Mr. Dean pointed out that the problem with “educating” the elders on a particular issue is that one who votes in favor of an issue would also express his reason for doing so.

Clyde Kilough observed that there seems to be a growing sentiment among the general conference for more participation. Many elders feel that since they’ve gone to the effort of being at the annual meeting there should be an opportunity to discuss these matters openly. They express that if the Council can discuss amendments in their meetings without becoming politicized, why can’t the general conference? Mr. Kilough allowed that there is the risk that the discussion could become politicized.

Mr. Register confirmed Mr. Kilough’s observation about the increased interest in open discussion. He stated that the exit surveys for the 2002 and 2003 general conferences show a significant number of comments in favor of openly discussing ballot issues before voting. He also indicated that many of those comments requesting open discussion emphasize that they need to be conducted in an orderly manner, controlled by a moderator or facilitator.

Robert Dick pointed out that the resolution unanimously passed by the Council in its December 7, 2003 meeting asked that “the GCE 2004 Advisory Task Force bring further recommendations with regards to the suggestion for a Q&A session about *ballot issues*.” He stated that in past GCE meetings the discussion of the annual budget and strategic plan have at times been very important.

President Roy Holladay observed that the general conference would like to discuss the strategic plan, operation plan and budget as well as the amendments.

Based on the discussion, the Council unanimously agreed to the following resolution (Joel Meeker not present):

Whereas, the 2004 GCE Planning Task Force has suggested that there be a Q & A session before the ballot process is conducted,

Now therefore, it is hereby resolved, that the Annual Meeting of the GCE 2004 include in its schedule a workshop on Saturday evening, May 1, 2004, for the purpose of giving information and answering questions regarding the ballot issues, (excluding the Council nominees),

It is further resolved, that the format for conducting the workshop will be developed by the 2004 GCE Advisory Task Force for Council consideration by March 1, 2004.

Mr. Kilough also asked the Ethics, Roles and Rules Committee of the Council to participate in the GCE Advisory Task Force’s upcoming teleconference during which they will prepare a proposal for the workshop format.

Discussion on Council of Elders Q & A

Mr. Register had also provided the Council with a 13-point plan for the question and answer session with the Council on Sunday evening, May 2. He pointed out that the overall approach is that the discussion be done “decently and in order.” The most significant change from previous years, based on comments from last year’s survey, is the recommendation that there be a time limit on comments and questions. The Council’s response will also be limited, but at the Chairman’s discretion additional time could be taken if several Council members would like to respond to a question.

After making a couple of minor edits (including the addition of a 14th point) the Council unanimously agreed to a motion to accept the task force’s proposal.

Discussion of Lectures and Workshops

In the December Council meetings the GCE Advisory Task Force was asked to work with Ministerial Services and the regional pastors to finalize a list of lectures and workshops and select the presenters. Mr. Register provided the task force’s recommendations for the Council’s suggestions and comments.

A workshop on the subject of demons attracted some discussion. Mr. Horchak recalled that the Council had previously suggested that the topic not be included.

Mr. Kubik expressed that it can be very difficult to discern whether a person has a mental disease or is influenced by a demon. He didn’t feel it would be wise to present that topic to the general conference until the Council and doctrine committee had some discussions on it.

Mr. Seigle suggested that there is a need for guidelines because it’s been so long since any instruction has been given on the subject that many ministers have no idea how to deal with demons.

Les McCullough pointed out that the Church has never specifically addressed this subject. He agreed that it would be unwise to do so until there has been a doctrinal study and a discussion by the Council.

Mr. Dick agreed and also emphasized that lacking a formal study on the subject, whatever might be said would become a *defacto* doctrinal statement. He advised it would be better to do a more thorough study before presenting it to the general conference.

Mr. Kilough remanded the matter to Mr. Thompson, chairman of the Council’s Education and Ministerial Services committee, asking him to discuss the issue with Richard Pinelli, Ministerial Services operation manager.

Mr. Register mentioned that plans are being made to use an outside presenter to teach the 3-hour advanced Prepare/Enrich program. Mr. Kubik warned that some of what will be taught will contradict our teachings (such as dealing with engaged couples who already live together).

Mr. Horschak concurred with Mr. Kubik's concerns and also questioned why the advanced module is necessary since it isn't required for the use of Prepare/Enrich. Mr. Register commented there is some expectation of it because it was stated last year that the advanced program would be offered in 2004.

Mr. Register said he has discussed our conservative views and that the presenter understands our sensitivities. He also pointed out that Mr. Pinelli has budgeted for the expense and is in favor of offering the advanced program. Mr. Register said he would take the Council's concerns to Mr. Pinelli and if he still approves, would make arrangements for this presenter.

Ballot Amendments

The proposed amendment to Constitution Article 1.0 (Mission Statement) received the necessary support from the general conference and will be included on the ballot.

Aaron Dean has completed the edits suggested by the Council on two amendments that he submitted (Constitution Article 5.1.1 and Bylaw Article 12.2.2.12). These proposed amendments will also be included on the ballot.

In the December meetings the Council had decided to write a statement of concern on a proposed amendment to Bylaw 8.3.1, however that was never submitted. However, the proposed amendment did not receive adequate support from the general conference and will not be included on the ballot.

February meetings

As the teleconferenced concluded, Mr. Kilough urged the Council members to send him agenda items for the next face-to-face meetings which will begin with committee meetings on February 23.

Don Henson

-end-

© 2004 United Church of God, *an International Association*