

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
February 29, 2004 – Cincinnati OH

This morning's meeting was taken up by updates from the Doctrine Committee. In the afternoon the Council worked on the revision of two amendments to be sent for congregational review and to be included on the ballot at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Elders.

Doctrine Committee

Jim Franks, chairman of the Doctrine Committee, gave an overview of the doctrinal review process for study papers developed by the Council of Elders in 1996. That process was approved by the General Conference of Elders and has been implemented since that time. Mr. Franks described the eight-step process:

1. In 1996 the Doctrine Committee compiled a list of doctrinal questions based on input from ministers and members.
2. Those doctrinal questions were given to teams of researchers and advisors to begin work on the various topics.
3. Researchers and advisors received input from a variety of sources. In addition to the assigned study papers assigned by the Doctrine Committee, members and ministers can independently produce papers on various items for researchers and advisors to consider.
4. Papers are completed and submitted to a review team. Review teams are composed of researchers and advisors who were not involved in writing the papers. Currently there are two such teams: the Advisory Committee for Doctrine and the Prophecy Advisory Committee.
5. Papers are reviewed and returned to the original group of writers for editing.
6. Papers are submitted to the Doctrine Committee for review and editing, and, or may possibly be returned to the original team of researchers and advisors for more work.
7. When the Doctrine Committee feels a paper is ready, it is submitted to Council with a recommendation. The Council may return the paper to the Doctrine Committee for further work.
8. When the Council approves the paper, arrangements are made for publishing. If the Council believes a doctrinal change is being proposed the paper is submitted to the General Conference with recommendation for approval.

In addition to the study and doctrinal paper process, the Council established the unified review process to review all other articles and publications. Mr. Franks expressed his confidence that this procedure has worked well. A team of reviewers goes through every article and booklet before they can be published. If even one member of the review team feels there is a doctrinal issue, the question is resolved before it is put into print..

Mr. Franks stated that, to his knowledge, the Church has not printed any article or booklet that contradicts our fundamental beliefs or traditional teachings.

Mr. Franks emphasized that no one individual or small group controls Church doctrine. More than one hundred elders and members are involved in researching, writing or reviewing study papers, articles and booklets submitted for publication.

He commented that according to the adopted process the Council of Elders must determine whether a matter of doctrine is sent to the General Conference of Elders for their review and approval. In order to determine whether a document includes a doctrinal change, it is compared to previously published articles or booklets. For example, the recent paper on whether it is allowable to eat in a restaurant on the Sabbath was proven to be the traditional teaching of the Church based on written evidence which included a 1961 *Good News* article.

Mr. Franks summarized the status of the 36 papers that the Doctrine Committee, Advisory Committee for Doctrine and Prophecy Advisory Committee have reviewed since November 2002. Most of the papers were submitted by members or elders and were not specifically assigned by the Doctrine Committee.

Mr. Franks also reviewed the status of the eight study paper projects currently underway:

- Nature of God and Christ (the last of the original 20 papers requested by the General Conference in 1996). This study paper is nearly complete. Mr. Franks reviewed portions of it with the Council in today's meeting. It should be ready to be submitted for Council approval by May 2004.
- Role of Women in the Bible. This paper is in the final discussion stage between the group that prepared it and the Doctrine Committee.
- Statement on Interracial Marriage. The committee just received this paper and has begun to review it.
- What Is Leaven? This paper, which seeks to clarify what is truly leavening was discussed in today's meeting.
- When should we keep the Sabbath in extreme northern (and southern) climates? This question will be addressed in a paper that is currently being prepared. It will specifically address the question of whether the Sabbath should be observed from sunset-to-sunset or from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. in these areas.
- Calendar Postponements. A paper dealing primarily with postponements, is still in the working stages.
- Sacred Names. This paper will address this doctrinal issue that comes up regularly.
- Review of papers on divorce that have been prepared by the Family Life Studies Committee. The Doctrine Committee has just received these papers and will begin reviewing them.

Mr. Franks then walked the Council through sections of the initial draft of the study paper “The Nature of God and Christ.” He commented that he wanted to give the Council some highlights from the paper so they could begin to become familiar with it.

Mr. Franks then asked Mario Seiglie to review with the Council a paper on the question of “What Is Leaven?” The need for clarification came about due to questions that arose from a Q & A published in *United News* in February, 2002. A more precise explanation is needed to distinguish between fermentation that is caused by yeast (a living organism) and the chemical or metabolic process that results from use of baking soda and baking powder. The conclusion is the same as we have taught in the past – during the Days of Unleavened Bread we should avoid food products that contain baking powder and baking soda, as well as yeast. The Council unanimously approved a resolution accepting the edited answer, which will be published in *United News* prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The Council also suggested edits to the short paper that includes the more complete answer to the question. Mr. Seiglie will present the edited version to the Council for approval in tomorrow’s meeting.

Ambassador Bible Center

Richard Thompson, chairman of the Education and Ministerial Services Committee, gave an update on the status and progress of the Ambassador Bible Center. The ABC staff presented a list of areas in which there has been progress as well as several questions, suggestions and ideas for further development.

The Council was asked to grant authority to Gary Antion and Ralph Levy to lead a study into the question of whether ABC might ever be expanded to a two-year program. Larry Darden, the Church’s legal counsel, submitted a brief report showing the criteria under which the U.S. government would allow students from international areas to attend ABC.

Since the question of whether ABC might expand to a two-year program is one that many have asked, Council members felt it was reasonable to study into the matter. However, they emphasized that care must be taken not to raise any expectations. What the Council is considering is a preliminary study into possibilities – it is not a plan to expand ABC.

After discussion, the subject was tabled to allow Mr. Thompson to prepare a resolution for the Council to consider on the matter.

Amendment Proposals

In the December, 2004 meetings Aaron Dean submitted two amendment proposals that both he and the rest of the Council agreed should be rewritten. Those two

proposed amendments (Bylaw 12.2.2.12 and Constitution 5.1.1, which also affects Bylaw 7.7.1) were recently sent for congregational and General Conference review.

The Council voted unanimously to accept the edited version of Bylaw 12.2.2.12, which is a new section, specifying that if the General Conference passes two or more amendments on the same issue, the Council of Elders would determine which amendment would prevail. Mr. Dean will contact the Amendment Committee to withdraw the proposed amendment that was recently sent out for review and replace it with this version, as a submission by the Council of Elders.

The Council then turned its attention to the proposed amendment to Constitution 5.1.1 (which also affects Bylaw 7.7.1). This amendment addresses the constitutional requirement that three fourths of all the elders must agree to a change to the Fundamental Beliefs. The dilemma is that fewer than three fourths of the elders vote at all, making it impossible that a valid update to a doctrine could ever be passed. Mr. Dean and the Council worked together to carefully rewrite both the proposed amendment and the statement of justification. Council asked Mr. Dean to make the edits to the documents and bring them to tomorrow's meeting for final review and approval.

Agenda Update

Mr. Kilough quickly reviewed the agenda for Monday's meetings, which will include a report from the Godly Leadership task force and review of several business items tabled earlier in this session of meetings.

Today's meeting concluded at 5 p.m.

Don Henson

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