

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

This morning was the final open session for this series of meetings, during which the Council discussed strategies for communicating more effectively on issues facing the Church and developed the final draft of the “Media Philosophy of the United Church of God.” The Council went into executive session for the afternoon.

Communicating With the Church Membership

Aaron Dean, chairman of the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee, conducted a discussion on the issue of communicating important information to the Church membership. He stated that his committee had discussed these questions in a meeting prior to the Council meetings and felt that they should be brought to the entire Council for consideration.

Roy Holladay pointed out that in some situations the Church walks a thin line legally concerning public disclosure and comment, in particular in situations that involve personnel matters. The overall approach has been to take a low profile and make few if any public statements, which has resulted in a certain amount of misunderstanding and criticism of the Church. In discussing the matter with the Ministerial Services team, it has been decided that the Church should take a more proactive stance in providing information. Examples are the recent communications about the winter family tournament and the letter to the ministry on the subject of the evangelism conference. It is especially helpful to the ministry to understand why decisions are made. Information (and often misinformation) spreads very quickly over the Internet, and whoever states his case first usually seems to be right. It makes the Church seem defensive to come out later with an explanation.

Clyde Kilough commented that speculation always fills the void caused by a lack of information. He pointed out that whatever the Church publishes in-house (even if it’s labeled “confidential”) finds its way into various publications and Web sites that are not necessarily favorable toward United. Mr. Kilough stated that United needs to provide more information more quickly within the Church through letters to members, letters to the ministry, *United News* articles, etc., to equip our members with helpful information. If we do that more effectively internally, it will also be picked up by external sources.

Mr. Dean and Mr. Holladay suggested the possibility of using a press release to send information directly to an outside publication such as *The Journal* to state the Church’s point of view on certain controversial matters. Mario Seiglie suggested that there be a designated spokesman to represent the Church to outside publications. Joel Meeker and Jim Franks warned against legitimizing any source that is divisive and harmful to the Church. Mr. Holladay agreed, but felt there could be a way to constructively use such a source for “hot-button” issues about which it would be beneficial for the Church to explain its position.

Les McCullough pointed out that it would be best to receive advice from a professional when preparing sensitive material and information to be distributed both within and outside of the Church.

Richard Thompson commented that the lack of information results in deliberate distortion. He emphasized that United has resources to get out information—such as the Home Office Update, *United News*, letters from the chairman and president, informational e-mails sent to pastors that could be put on congregations' information tables, etc. He suggested there could be a section in *United News* to explain topics that have been distorted and misrepresented elsewhere. He expressed that if the Church were to use a public relations expert or professional press release writer, it would have to be someone who thoroughly understands the Church—its beliefs, values, sensitivities, subtleties and nuances.

Victor Kubik stated that the Church needs a person who is skilled at writing press releases or public statements. He commented that a public relations professional had contacted him recently and made helpful, constructive suggestions to improve some of our sensitive communications. Mr. Kubik emphasized that timing is also important. When it takes a long time for the Church to respond to a situation, it can mistakenly seem to others that we're trying to "get our story straight." He concluded that it's also important that the Church do a better job of communicating positive news about what we are accomplishing.

Mr. McCullough summarized that the Council agrees that something needs to be done to improve our communications efforts. He emphasized the importance of taking action, and not letting this matter be shuffled into a committee. He suggested that the Council consider seeking input from the public relations professional who had contacted Mr. Kubik. Mr. Kubik stated there is a possibility the individual would be interested and willing to help.

Mr. Kilough commented that we can provide communication training for some within the organization or contact someone outside to serve as a consultant. Mr. Holladay responded that the need is urgent. He suggested seeking a professional consultant for now and discussing a longer range solution during the December meetings.

Mr. Kilough requested the Media and Communications Committee and the home office administration to work together on a formal suggestion to the Council.

Plan for Completion of Evangelism Study Paper

Doug Horchak turned the Council's attention back to the "Evangelism in the Scripture" study paper. He reminded the Council that they had reviewed about a third of the paper in the meeting on Thursday, Aug. 26, which gave them an understanding of the substance of the study. He then asked the Council what level of priority they wanted to apply to the completion of the project.

Mr. Horchak suggested that this paper should be completed as quickly as possible. However, he pointed out that while this study has generated some level of anticipation and expectation, it's also clearly important to take the time necessary to get it right. After a little discussion, Mr. Horchak proposed that the Council complete its review within two weeks following the Feast of Tabernacles. He will incorporate the Council's comments and suggestions and have the task force give input on the reviewed paper. When their comments have also been included, Mr. Horchak will send the paper to the Doctrine Committee. The paper should be ready for final Council review and approval during the December 2004 meetings.

Amendment Committee Updates

Mr. Kilough wrapped up the Council's consideration of the recommendations Roc Corbett gave the Council in his presentation regarding the Amendment Committee. One of the suggestions was that the Council repeal a document titled "Statements of Justification, Concern and Congregational Input." Mr. Kilough suggested and the Council agreed that there would be time to take that action in the December 2004 meetings.

Another recommendation was that the Council catalog any interpretations that it has made to the Bylaws over the years. To follow up, Mr. Kilough asked Matthew Fenchel to review Council records and compile those interpretations, and then the Council can consider further actions. In a brief executive session the Council selected two elders to fill vacancies on the Amendment Committee: John Miller and Mark Rorem. They also selected Gerhard Marx to be an alternate to the committee.

Media Philosophy

In the May 2004 meetings the Council developed a document titled "Understanding Our Historical Marketing Philosophies for Reaching the World (18 Points)." This document summarized the Council's understanding of the principles that made the Church successful in its media strategy in the period of the 1960s to the 1980s.

Earlier this summer, from July 18 to 20, the Media and Communications Committee met in Cincinnati to develop a draft of a current and future media philosophy based on those 18 principles. Mr. Holladay and Peter Eddington reviewed the statement and a copy of it was sent to each Council member. During the meeting today the Council carefully reviewed the statement and suggested final edits. As a result, by resolution, the Council unanimously approved the following:

Media Philosophy of the United Church of God

Preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God is a divine commission given to the Church. The gospel message, which includes God's offer of the gift of salvation, shows His love for humanity. We must reflect that same love in the way we deliver His gospel to the world. We

seek to provide the world with hope for salvation, to help those who believe and repent, and to warn of the consequences of sin.

Jesus Christ and the apostles set clear examples of how to deliver the gospel most effectively. The principles illustrated by their examples still apply. We must speak and write in a way that challenges our audiences' wrong beliefs in a manner that is simple to understand, engaging, convincing and compelling. We must tailor the message to fit different cultural, national, religious and linguistic groups.

In a spiritually blind world, the deep truths of God are most effectively presented in a manner that leads from "milk" to "meat." For that reason, we must present the truth of God in a way that does not overwhelm people in either content or quantity.

The message is more important than those who deliver it. Consequently, we believe in focusing attention on the message of truth rather than on those who sponsor it. Furthermore, we believe in delivering the gospel primarily in the public arena rather than inviting people into the Church to receive it.

We believe we are required to freely give the truth to the world. Therefore, we offer our materials without charge or obligation.

We understand this is not the only day of salvation and that God alone can call someone, which means we are not responsible for converting the world. Nevertheless, we are still compelled by our mission to preach the gospel to all the world and care for those whom God calls.

We are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. As ambassadors, our message must remain above the ideologies, politics and religions of this world.

With this statement of philosophy the Council articulates the direction for the Church's media efforts. Specific policies and strategies will be built on this philosophy, which will continue to be developed in future meetings of the Media and Communications Committee and the Council in conjunction with the home office administration and media operations management.

Upcoming Council Meeting Dates

As this series of Council meetings came to its conclusion, Mr. Kilough reviewed the dates for the next two Council sessions:

Dec. 7 and 8, 2004—Council committee meetings.

Dec. 9 to 14, 2004—Council meetings (ending at 12 p.m. on the 14th).

Feb. 23 and 24, 2005—Council committee meetings.

Feb. 25 to March 2 or 3, 2005—Council meetings (ending date will depend on the agenda).

Don Henson

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