

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
December 12, 2004 – Cincinnati, OH

The Council completed the open session agenda today, bringing this series of meetings to a conclusion. The morning session consisted of a presentation by Mike Snyder, who has been contracted as a communications and public relations specialist to help the Council devise an effective communications and public relations strategy. In the afternoon, Roy Holladay reviewed a proposed retirement policy for Council approval. Peter Eddington reported on media efforts and results for the last quarter. Doug Horchak completed his review of the evangelism study paper project. Business concluded with the completion of a few housekeeping items and plans for the February 2005 meetings.

Refining the Communications Strategy

Mr. Holladay reviewed a Council resolution passed on May 17, 1999, which stated that the president is the official primary spokesman for the Church and that a public relations consultant would be hired to assist the Council in formulating a public relations strategy. Mr. Snyder, of the MEK Group in Indianapolis, Indiana, has been contracted to serve as a public relations consultant. Over the last couple of months Mr. Snyder has met several times with Mr. Holladay, Victor Kubik, Richard Pinelli, Mr. Eddington and Matthew Fenchel to provide assistance in developing an approach and strategy for communications both within and outside of the Church.

In his presentation Mr. Snyder advised the Council on various aspects of communications and public relations. He emphasized that the Council should develop more specific overall communications policies and empower the administration to carry them out. Mr. Snyder's presentation focused on the Church's efforts to communicate its message to the public as well as communications with members so that critical information can be distributed in a timely and honest way.

In regard to communicating the gospel message, Mr. Snyder suggested that the Church's message needs to be presented in a way that is relevant and practical rather than abstract. The Church, he said, needs to understand the market segments—particularly how people want to receive information—and the media that are effective in communicating with each, tailoring the message content to each audience segment so that they receive it in a way they prefer and thus can better potentially understand it. He commented that when people come into contact with United, every experience should be positive, with a real basis in fact. They should feel “invited” and welcome. Their response to the Church should bring an immediate “reward”—such as highly relevant literature, a personalized letter or e-mail or a personal note from a minister thanking them for attending services—the reward ultimately being that the information they receive and the relationship they may form with United actually improves their quality of life.

Mr. Snyder urged that *United News* should be filled with positive news about events and activities in the Church and how it is directly fulfilling its mission. He said that reading accounts about positive and factual achievements validates membership and rewards commitment. If there is “bad news,” members expect to be informed. Members look to the leaders to deal with the issues and to be proactive, timely and honest in addressing critical issues, good or bad.

Mr. Snyder stated he would be sending Mr. Holladay a written report and analysis and would be available for further consultation. The Council members expressed their appreciation to Mr. Snyder and their desire to have further discussion with him on these subjects after they have had time to consider his presentation and report.

U.S. Employee Retirement Policy

Mr. Holladay introduced a document that specifies a proposed retirement policy for U.S. employees. The purposes of the document are to summarize the philosophy, approach and procedures for transition into retirement and to provide employees with information about retirement benefits.

The policy statement is based on the work completed by the Retirement Task Force, commissioned by Mr. Holladay and chaired by Britt Taylor. The policy incorporates the task force’s recommendations and was developed by Mr. Holladay, Mr. Pinelli, Tom Kirkpatrick, Mr. Fenchel, Larry Darden and Chris Anderson.

Mr. Holladay emphasized and the policy itself makes it clear that this is not a defined benefit program. The policy is not a guarantee of benefits, but reflects the Church’s intent to provide assistance for retired employees. The policy spells out the responsibilities of the Church and the employee, planning for retirement and procedures leading to retirement. It also specifies the financial responsibility of the employee in preparing for retirement and the Church’s willingness to provide financial assistance where there is need. It also details health and life insurance benefits.

After reviewing the policy statement, the Council decided to prepare a resolution for its adoption, to be voted on later in the day.

Media and Communications Services Report

Mr. Eddington provided the Council with a review of some of the ongoing efforts and results of the media and communications activities.

He opened his presentation by distributing samples of two new collections of reprint articles that are bound in a magazine format. These reprints on “Marriage and Family” and “Successful Parenting” are available in this format since they are requested frequently. He pointed out that dozens of other reprint articles are available for download at the Church’s Web site, www.ucg.org/reprints.

In a recent development, the Church has been contacted by XM satellite radio and offered a Sunday morning time slot on their “Family Talk” station. The 8:30 a.m. program would air immediately after Dr. James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family*. This medium would provide an excellent demographic, since as a subscription service it serves those in a higher income bracket and some 98 percent of listeners are in the 35 to 54 age group.

Mr. Eddington reported that best-selling author Hope Egan has asked permission to publish United’s list of clean and unclean meats in her new book titled *Holy Cow! What the Bible Says about Eating Meat*. She also asked David Treybig, UCG pastor and author of the Church’s booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*, to write a back-cover endorsement for the book. After reading the manuscript, Mr. Treybig agreed to do so.

Beginning in February 2005, the Church will send audio sermons on CDs in MP3 format rather than cassette tapes. Those receiving the tapes will be sent a letter this week explaining the change. Members who don’t already have a CD player that plays both regular CDs and MP3 CDs will need to purchase one. Ambassador Bible Center classes on the General Epistles and the books of Daniel and Revelation will be sent this week to church libraries on MP3 CD instead of audiotape. In addition, within the next year or so sermons videotapes will be produced and distributed on DVD. These new processes will significantly reduce both duplicating and mailing costs, and will increase the quality.

Five new advertising brochures have been designed for supermarket displays and for distribution by membership. Each brochure will advertise a particular booklet and offer a subscription to *The Good News*. Sample copies will be mailed to each pastor, and brethren will be encouraged to help with distribution.

Traffic at the Church’s Web site has increased dramatically in the last 12 months. Since January of this year the number of visitors has increased from about 180,000 to over 300,000 per month. A survey of members at this year’s Feast of Tabernacles reveals that only a small percentage of members go to the Web site more than a few times each month—which means that the vast majority of those who visit the site are nonmembers.

We have reached the goal of \$150,000 in special donations for the proposed home office media center. In January 2005, Dr. Kirkpatrick will analyze the overall budget to ensure that regular income has not been affected by contributions to the special fund. If all is well, construction of the space and purchase of equipment will begin.

During the last 12 months the mailroom staff mailed 425,568 pieces of literature from the home office. This is a 27 percent increase over the previous 12 months (333,828 pieces). If each of these pieces of literature were stacked on top of each other, the pile would be 4,443 feet high! Laid end-to-end, the literature would stretch 67 miles! And what’s mailed directly from the home office is, of course, in addition to the millions of pieces sent out from the printers for *The Good News*, *United News*, *World News* and *Prophecy* and new booklets. Thousands more are mailed from international offices.

The number of donors on file is now 6,047, which is an increase of 17 percent over the same time last year. The number of coworkers is 2,633—an increase of 18 percent.

Feast Video Feedback and Plans for Next Year

Mr. Eddington reported that feedback from members on the video sermon shown at this year's Feast of Tabernacles has been favorable.

The initial plan for next year is to highlight the Church in South Africa, Malawi and Zambia. Mr. Eddington asked Council members to consider the theme of the message and who the speaker(s) will be for the 2005 Feast message. Plans will be finalized and presented to the Council in the February 2005 meetings.

Evangelism Study Paper Update

Mr. Horchak completed the report on the status of the evangelism study paper. He reviewed definitions of terms and suggested use of terminology that resulted from the conclusions of the paper.

He requested that Council members complete their review of the paper so there can be agreement on the paper's conclusions and the understanding of scriptures cited. Clyde Kilough volunteered to incorporate comments from Council members and write the final draft of the paper for review by the Doctrine Committee. The plan is for the paper to be in its final form for Council approval at the February 2005 meetings. It would then be available for all elders to review and give their input before it is released in final form.

Amendment, Retirement Policy and History Project Resolutions

Leon Walker discussed the need to change the statement of justification for the proposed amendment to Bylaw 12.2.2.8 so that it is in agreement with the final version of the proposed amendment. In order to do so, it was necessary to rescind the original resolution that adopted the proposal of the amendment and adopt a new resolution in its place, both of which were supported unanimously by the Council.

Aaron Dean introduced a resolution to rescind a previous resolution that dealt with discretionary assistance for retired employees and then presented a new resolution to adopt the "U.S. Employee Retirement Policy" presented to the Council earlier in the day. Both resolutions passed on unanimous votes.

Mario Seigle proposed a resolution for the Council to commission Victor Kubik to select a Council-approved team to collect, organize and record a chronology of events that led to the formation of the United Church of God. The resolution was passed by unanimous consent.

Dates and Location for February-March 2005 Meeting

Mr. Kilough established that the next Council meetings will be on February 23 through March 3, 2005. Council committees will meet February 23 and 24 and the meetings will follow on February 25 to March 3. The meetings will be held at the Clarion River Walk hotel in San Antonio, Texas.

This concluded the open session business and, after executive sessions Sunday afternoon and Monday morning, the meeting officially adjourned December 13.

Don Henson

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