

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
May 11, 2006 – Cincinnati, OH

On the final day of this three-day series of meetings, the Council met at 9 a.m. to complete its executive session business. Open session started at 10 a.m.

Amendment Schedule and Assessment Form

The Council unanimously agreed by resolution to accept the annual schedule for amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws to be considered by the General Conference of Elders at the 2007 annual meeting, as presented by Council Secretary Gerald Seelig earlier in the week.

The Council then turned its attention to the performance assessment form it will use to evaluate the president and secretary for their annual performance reviews. Joel Meeker, chairman of the Ethics, Roles and Rules Committee, led the Council through a detailed discussion of the specific performance criteria and process by which the Council will administer the president's and secretary's annual reviews. By resolution, the Council voted unanimously to accept the assessment forms as edited.

Strategic Planning Brainstorming Session

During the February/March meeting, the Council determined it would evaluate and revamp its approach to the creation of the Church's Strategic Plan document. Council Chairman Robert Dick emphasized that an effective strategic plan has a horizon of about three years. The Church's current Strategic Plan has been modified and updated from year to year. However, Mr. Dick emphasized, it is now time to rethink and reprioritize the strategies it enumerates.

As an initial step in that direction, Mr. Dick led the Council in a brainstorming session for the purpose of focusing on the upcoming 2006-2007 fiscal year. Prior to this session, Mr. Dick had asked each member to be prepared to discuss what he felt were the Church's three most urgent issues and how they can be met.

The format was a "roundtable" discussion. Mr. Dick started with Larry Salyer, who was seated to his left, and continued around the table clockwise asking each member to enumerate the first item on his list. Clyde Kilough summarized each statement on a white board at the front of the conference room. Mr. Dick proceeded around the table two more times to complete the process. Mr. Salyer volunteered to take detailed notes and send them to all of the Council members so they can review them and give further thought in preparation for the meetings in August.

As a brainstorming session, this two-hour discussion was a free-flowing expression of thoughts and ideas. It was not intended to lead to decisions or conclusions.

The following summaries are a composite of the comments, some of which are overlapping or may even seem somewhat conflicting. The purpose was to put ideas on the table to provide a starting point or platform for further and more specific discussions on strategic planning in future meetings.

As each Council member added his comments, a theme and consensus quickly became apparent. The primary issues that were addressed were the spiritual health of the Church, development of pastoral leadership and media efforts in preaching the gospel message.

Comments dealing with the spiritual health of the Church included:

- A reminder that we must always focus on getting ourselves in “working order” if we are going to take a message to the world.
- The Council should emphasize that as individuals and an organization, what we teach must be consistent with how we live. We don’t really have a message for the world until we internalize and live it.
- When United was first formed, doctrine was a driving force. While doctrine brings us out of the world, it is vision and mission that holds us together. It is a unified, passionate voice of the Church that holds us together. Lacking vision, members can have the attitude that “we have our local congregation, what else do we need?” The vision and mission of the Church should be clear so that members do not have to question what our mission and vision are.
- Our teachings should emphasize the critical importance of the “basics” of our Christianity through prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. When most of the Church does these things most of the time, there will be stability and growth.
- Emphasize to members that the United Church of God has what Christians need. We should be able to articulate a more effective defense against those who attack United or leave because they don’t think this Church can provide what they need.
- Remind members to be watchful and alert; not to fall, as Jesus warned in Luke 21, into “carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life.” The world is coming at us from every direction, undermining everything that constitutes a strong church, and it can have a deadening effect on us.
- When we create the proper environment in a local congregation, the future leadership we need will emerge.
- A sense of mission and urgency must be maintained in the Church—showing that we have an urgent, incisive message that we must deliver to the world.

Specific dangers include:

- Lack of commitment to God and His way of life.
- Falling into the “cares of the world” and materialism.
- Not openly dealing with matters that have been problematic, such as why there needs to be an organized Church, establishing clear moral values, recapturing true values, how the Church is affected by postmodernism, the world’s political system, etc.
- The spirit of independence and separation.
- Having zeal eroded if we don’t always emphasize the importance of loving God and His truth; we can’t be zealous unless we are committed.

- Ongoing doctrinal criticism on matters, most of which seem to recycle every few decades and that negatively influence members, such as calendar issues and the use of sacred names.

Comments dealing with developing and strengthening the ministry included:

- Continue to develop the ministerial training program and focus on developing younger leaders for the future.
- It takes years to develop strong spiritual leaders who can continue carrying the torch of God's way and truth. God works in His Church through people, so we must do what we can as a Church to facilitate growth, education and opportunities for God to work through His people.
- The Church has a pool of "middle-aged" potential leaders (30 to 45 year olds) who already have a great deal of training. We need to provide them with opportunities and challenges.
- Encourage the ministry to continue their education and to hone their skills.
- Provide older and retired elders with opportunities to continue to serve the Church. Hold them in high regard and tap into their wisdom and experience.
- One of the strengths of United is that we started with an experienced and educated ministry—now we need to build on that to meet future needs.
- Passion in the congregations of the Church is going to come in large part from passionate local pastors. Empower and encourage pastors to make them feel part of what the Church is doing, which will make movement into the future easier.
- The pastoral ministry needs to have confidence that administrative leadership will support their efforts in doing what needs to be done, and vice versa, to strengthen the Church.

Comments dealing with media efforts and message included:

- The Church needs a more unified direction and strong leadership for media efforts.
- Establish a stronger and more visible "trademark" or "brand" that sets us apart. The Church's message is right and it is the best message; it should stand out from others. We should preach that message with purpose and passion.
- As Herbert Armstrong did before us, we need to understand the world for what it is and meet people where they are. We should ask ourselves, "How well does our message resonate with their needs both on a rational level and on an emotional level?" We need to understand what's happening in their lives, connect with them and meet their needs.

Mr. Dick concluded the discussion by again emphasizing that this kind of "think tank" session will help the Council continue the process of strategic thinking and strategic planning in the August meetings. Mr. Salyer will distribute to the Council members his detailed notes to assist them in their consideration of the topic.

Resolution for Canadian Television

The final formal business item was the passage of a resolution allowing the *Beyond Today* television program to be aired on a month-to-month basis as a market test on a cable network in Canada called Vision TV/The Christian Channel, which is the closest equivalent to cable-access television in the United States. The resolution also stipulates that until the airing of *Beyond Today* has completed its research and development stage in the United States, airing the program in any other part of the world requires Council of Elders' permission. The resolution was passed by unanimous vote.

Farewell to Mario Seigle and Tony Wasilkoff

At the conclusion of this series of meetings, the Council bid farewell to Council members Mario Seigle and Tony Wasilkoff, whose terms of office will expire on June 30. Mr. Seigle served on the Council for six years and Mr. Wasilkoff for three years. The Council gave each a token gift of appreciation and thanked them for their service to the Church.

The Council meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

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Don Henson

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