

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
March 2, 2008—San Antonio, Texas

Chairman Robert Dick called today's meeting to order at 9 a.m. All Council members were again present. A few Council members had traveled to outlying congregations over the Sabbath, and two had given split sermons in San Antonio. After the opening prayer, Jim Franks spoke about the recent Feast coordinators meeting.

Feast Coordinators Meeting Update

Mr. Franks commented that all the U.S. and Canadian Feast coordinators were present for the annual meeting in February. This was the first year the Caribbean Feast coordinators were there, because over 800 Americans attended Caribbean sites this past year. The Caribbean area will now be included in the U.S. and Canadian Festival registration process.

One of the issues that the coordinators discussed was having a consistent approach on how the Holy Day offerings would be announced and collected. The coordinators suggested that a special announcement period of about 5 to 10 minutes be devoted to presenting the reasons for the collection of the Holy Day offering. Mr. Franks presented a letter for Council review. After some discussion, the Council gave Mr. Franks approval to send out the letter to the pastors and Feast coordinators.

The next subject that Mr. Franks talked about was the long-standing request for traveling Americans to send the bulk of their Holy Day offerings to the home office either prior to or after returning from an overseas Feast site. This policy had generated some questions, so Mr. Franks presented an article for Council review. Mr. Franks also mentioned that the international areas had approved the content of the article. After some discussion, the Council gave approval for the article to be placed in the *Festival Planning Brochure*.

Bloc Voting and the Proper Approach to Balloting

One of the agenda items listed for this quarterly round of Council meetings was to have a discussion on what constitutes bloc voting and the proper approach to balloting.

Mr. Dick presented a historical review of this topic. During the 1998 GCE meetings in Louisville, Kentucky, the Council ran into the only verifiable incidence of attempted bloc voting. A group of elders determined they would vote as a bloc for an agreed-upon group of candidates. It was brought to the Council's attention at that time, and the chairman of the Council and the chairman of the Ethics Committee were instructed by the Council of Elders to talk with the elders involved. The elders were informed that evidence of bloc voting would invalidate their ballots. No evidence of follow-through was found, and the issue went away for nine years.

In 2007, another charge of bloc voting was brought to the Council. Again, the chairman of the Council and the chairman of the Ethics Committee were asked to investigate the charges. The results of the investigation revealed that, even though a line was crossed, there was no proven intent to promote voting for a slate of candidates as a bloc. An apology was given and accepted for crossing the line, and no further actions were taken.

Mr. Dick asked the Council to go back to December 1995 and consider where we started. The Council and the GCE had firmly established that our balloting process was to represent our appeal to God. We were to seek God by prayer for Him to guide us. All the elders broke from the meeting and went to their individual rooms to spend time in personal private prayer asking for God's direction in the balloting for Council members. That practice kept our focus on the fact that our appeal was to God to guide us.

Leon Walker then mentioned that he is concerned about any clandestine action in the form of alternative forums, in which an elder sends out a list of men suggesting they should be selected to be on the Council. Since there is a desire for transparency coming from the Council, there should also be transparency coming from the GCE.

Richard Thompson stated that bloc voting challenges the principle of seeking God's Spirit to guide our actions. We need to go back into the rooms to pray before we ballot because we really do want to have God's involvement. Richard Pinelli said that we all try to nominate the best man for the Council, but there should not be an alternate forum that promotes "their" men for the Council.

Bill Eddington, Bob Berendt, Aaron Dean and Roy Holladay each pointed out that there is a lack of understanding among the elders as to what can be discussed in relation to the choosing of elders for Council service. Bloc voting needs to be defined, and it must be stated why it is wrong. Larry Salyer stated that any form of influencing an elder by another elder is breaking the spirit of proper balloting. There should be no influence from one elder to another. Victor Kubik mentioned that we are not here to represent various constituencies, but we are here to represent the will of God.

Mr. Franks commented that there is a general belief among many in the ministry that bloc voting is occurring, and that the Council shouldn't be naïve about it. The solution is to educate the elders on the need to avoid politics, and that any compromising in the balloting through manipulation is not what we wanted. We should seek spiritual guidance through fasting and praying. Mr. Franks reminded the Council that an official statement from the Denver 1995 meeting of the Transitional Board stated that United was not intending to establish a form of representational governance as practiced in the U.S. government. We did not see ourselves as a divided body with various factions to represent.

Clyde Kilough said that the choices elders make for Council members are through personal prayer and fasting. Elders don't want to be swayed by other elders. It is highly

offensive to be contacted by elders as to how they think we ought to ballot. The exclusivity of any secret forum is against our efforts of transparency.

Mr. Dick concluded the morning session by stating that now that we have had an opportunity to voice opinions and concerns, we need to come back and address recommended steps toward a solution. Upon returning from the lunch break, Mr. Dick opened the floor for those comments.

A number of Council members mentioned that education is important in this issue, and that the term *bloc voting* has to be defined. Mr. Franks mentioned that we can inform elders that they don't have to fill out all the slots for nominations. An elder can ballot for just one or two names if he feels he doesn't know the candidates. Mr. Pinelli stated that the roles of the Council and the GCE need to be explained again, and how the Council is chosen. This topic is presented in the training programs.

Mr. Kubik said it is important that the "high road" be taken and that the highest of values needs to be emphasized. Mr. Eddington asked if we should try to avoid using the term *bloc voting* and use a term such as *undue influence*. Mr. Dick reiterated that the term *bloc voting* was used by those in 1998 to define their actions. If the Council wishes to create a new term, that is quite acceptable, but it should be remembered that we use the term the way we do because of precedence.

It is not overbearing to state our principles, said Mr. Franks. It is a serious matter when somebody breaks the principles, and then goes on as normal. The regional pastors have stated that since we have principles by which we operate, then we should all live by them.

Mr. Walker then mentioned the term *lobbying*. Sending out a list of men for nomination is a lobbying effort. It is true that we need to educate and take the "high road," but the Council can't hide its head over this problem. We can't take 1 Corinthians out of the Bible. Problems were there in Corinth, and they had to be addressed. Mr. Dean also commented that this activity may involve just a few of the GCE, but that it needs to be communicated that wrong is wrong whether it is done by just two or by 100.

Mr. Dick concluded this discussion by mentioning that this issue will be brought back for discussion later this week to determine a course of action to be taken by the Council. He thanked the Council members for their input, and then turned the floor over to Mr. Kubik to lead the Council in a discussion of improving the effectiveness of the Elder's Forum.

Elder's Forum Survey Results and Assessment

Mr. Kubik reviewed the results of the Elder's Forum survey that was sent to the GCE in late January. Of the 470 elders in United, 299 or 64 percent are on the Elder's Forum, and 166 elders completed the survey. Based on the results of the survey, which

also contained 65 pages of verbatim comments, the Council discussed at length the effectiveness of the Elder's Forum.

Mr. Kubik proposed instituting a Web-based forum as an improvement. One could log in to a specific Web site and read postings in the eight to 10 different categories that could be set up. Mr. Holladay said that this Web-based forum would be good because one would not receive e-mails, and that one could go to the forum as desired. This is not a chat-room type of setup. Mr. Kubik stated that he is working with Scott Delamater on this Web-based forum and that the URL of "GCE Forum.org" has been purchased.

Mr. Kilough pointed out that changing the vehicle is one of the easiest ways to improve the forum, but the more difficult questions that were raised in the survey (degree of guidelines, for example) need to be settled.

Mr. Dick then asked for a consensus from the Council on proceeding with a Web-based forum. Mr. Kubik was given the approval to proceed to set up a Web-based forum for the Council of Elders so they could do a beta test and come back with their impressions of its practicality as soon as possible. Mr. Franks asked if it could be established prior to the call-and-notice packet being sent out, and Mr. Kubik responded that could be a possibility.

Executive Sessions

The Council concluded the open session at 3:45 p.m. and went into executive session for the remainder of the afternoon.

On the following morning, March 3, 2008, the Council went into executive session for the entire day.

John Foster
Council Reporter

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