

**United Church of God, *an International Association***  
**General Conference of Elders Meeting Report**  
**May 17-19, 2008—Cincinnati, Ohio**

The annual General Conference of Elders meeting included a special Sabbath service May 17. President Clyde Kilough gave a sermon on spiritual maturity that was heard by an estimated 5,400 members. There were 196 elders and 146 elders' wives registered for the conference, and 90 congregations were on phone hookups. There were also 401 video Web connections, 53 English audio connections and nine Spanish connections.

On Sunday, May 18, the business meeting of the General Conference of Elders began with Chairman Robert Dick calling on Les McCullough to open with prayer. The theme of the conference was "Going on to Perfection: Increasing Spiritual Maturity."

Mr. Dick introduced the 14 elders of United Church of God ordained or credentialed since last year: Bill and Joanna Bradford, David Campbell, Grant and Kim Chick, Fred and Sandy Davidson, Ed and RaeAnn Dowd, Michael and Angelene Erickson, Kossi and Delali Fiaboé, Charles and Kaye Haughee, Ralph and Ingrid Helge, Bill and Ronnie Kubon, Tony and Brenda Levy, Antonio and Christine Ndung'u, Jerrison and Nice Shachoongo and Terry and Linda Swagerty.

**Keynote Address**

After the balloting, Mr. Dick gave the keynote address. He asked, "Is the theme 'Going on to Perfection' a platitude or a precept"—a set of marching orders? "What have I done that is worth something to God?" He gave James 1:27, Psalm 15 and Job 29:12-17 as examples of the priorities that really matter.

Mr. Dick mentioned the problem identified early in United's history, "We have not always treated one another in a godly manner." He commented on some of United's successes, including creating appeals processes, the peaceful transitions of power in UCG offices, teen summer camp program, the long-range planning for retiree care and the relations with those of other churches.

Mr. Dick commended the Council for their work on outcomes-based strategic planning. He said we don't want to just be spending long hours working, but we want to be producing fruit. Ours is a challenging field to measure, he acknowledged, but we are making progress in measuring the more challenging area of human services.

**International Reports**

Five encouraging international reports were presented this year. (International regions present reports to the GCE on a rotating basis.)

Peter Hawkins reported on the British Isles, with its various ethnic groups and cosmopolitan nature. Out of a population of 60 million, our current *Good News* distribution is about 5,000, and there are 170 members and families attending. There are no full-time pastors, but the elders there serve diligently. He highlighted leadership training, summer camps and subscriber development.

Melvin Rhodes gave a presentation on the Church in Ghana. There are 12 congregations and 20 outlying Bible studies served by 11 pastors and 20 elders. Of the 700 who attend now, about half are children. Mr. Rhodes mentioned a man he met when he went to Ghana 30 years ago who is now in United, along with his 10 children. Ghana is doing comparatively well economically; the Ghanaian cedi is now worth more than the U.S. dollar!

Tony Wasilkoff reported on Canada, a country where the westernmost and easternmost congregations are 4,500 miles apart. Six full-time pastors serve the congregations in Canada, along with one pastor serving a congregation from the United States. There are also 18 elders. The Canadian office includes three full-time and three part-time staff members and one volunteer, and they are hoping to add more. Nearly 4,000 *Good News* subscribers came onto the Canadian list through the November 2007 *Reader's Digest* ad. Mr. Wasilkoff highlighted several families, including a family that lives a 12-hour drive north of Edmonton, the nearest congregation.

David Baker's international report was on the Philippines/Asia. Asia is home to 3.9 billion people! There are 16,449 *Good News* subscribers throughout Asia.

In the aftermath of the cyclone in Myanmar, several have asked Mr. Baker about the people there. There are no members in Myanmar, but the subscribers he has heard from there were not injured, though many suffered property damage.

Since 2001, membership in Asia has grown from 400 to over 800. They are planning seven Feast sites in Asia this year, including a small one in India. The greatest concentration of members is in the Philippines, where the office is. There are three full-time office employees, along with interns from around the Philippines. Mr. Baker also mentioned working with two groups in India that had no contact with our former association. They have their own ministers and buildings and so really have no need for us, but they want to join with United to do a work.

The Caribbean report was given by Kingsley Mather. The *Good News* circulation in the Caribbean region is 3,706. There are 165 baptized members in nine congregations and five monthly Bible studies, served by two full-time elders, an elder who works for the Church part-time and another elder. Jamaica and Barbados are the largest churches in the Caribbean. The Church is going back to newspaper advertising in the region; Mr. Mather mentioned that an ad in Trinidad still received responses a year later. He also said they hope to expand the Caribbean Leadership Training program.

After the international presentations, Ken Giese gave tribute to the deceased elders and wives. Honored this year were Jo Anderson, Richard Fenstermacher and William Winner.

### **President's Address**

In President Clyde Kilough's address, he reminded the elders about the media coverage that came last December with interviews of various elders about Christians who don't keep Christmas. These interviews were published and broadcast around the world! We couldn't have planned or paid for that coverage. God reminded us it is His work. Mr. Kilough asked, What does God have in mind in His operation plan?

Mr. Kilough said that sometimes we are problem solvers, and sometimes we must be opportunity solvers. Ministerial Services generally solves problems; Media and Communications Services must deal with many opportunities in this world of information overload. Preparing a people is more tightly defined. Proclaiming the gospel is so diverse since our audience is the whole world!

Our mission and vision are our key "drivers" to go forward. Mr. Kilough said we can't allow the unknown to drive us to anxiety. We should be "faith-based"—relying on God. We can't be rash, but we can't be timid.

Mr. Kilough thanked Tom Kirkpatrick for his years of service as treasurer. He then introduced the new treasurer, Jason Lovelady.

### **Treasurer's Address**

Mr. Lovelady also thanked Dr. Kirkpatrick for his fiscal management and his mentoring. Mr. Lovelady said his role is a support function. He said he asks himself how he can best support Media, Ministerial Services, the president and the Council in fulfilling their first-line responsibilities.

Mr. Lovelady listed the following areas of emphasis: Conservative budgeting, strategic planning, managerial reporting and human resources and information services.

He pointed out that even after the purchase of the land in Texas, we still have more than the required 10 weeks of income in reserve. Mr. Lovelady also gave a handout of the May 9 cash flow report and listed the salary ranges for Church employees.

### **Ministerial Services**

Jim Franks, Ministerial Services operation manager, discussed the congregational care section of the Strategic Plan. He pointed out that in the Gospels Christ put a great deal of emphasis on training for the future, so that would have been part of the strategic plan for the beginning of the Church. He explained that United made a commitment to all the members to provide a pastor for each congregation.

Mr. Franks also gave the following statistics: There has been a 1.5 percent increase in U.S. church attendance for the year (about 200 more people). Average attendance is 11,430. High attendance was 13,374 for the First Day of Unleavened Bread. There's been a decrease of two pastors (89 to 87), and the number will likely drop to 85 soon because of retirements. At the high, United had 125 pastors.

Mr. Franks also reported on education programs such as Ambassador Bible Center, which is expanding to a nine-month program and will be featured in a video in the next few weeks. He mentioned that Ministerial Services is doing ABC, *World News and Prophecy*, focused education and marriage seminars. Sabbath youth instruction and Festival youth instruction lessons are being rewritten. Mr. Franks also discussed the United Youth Corps and the ministerial development programs.

Mr. Franks concluded that we are seeing real growth, even if not large, and that we face an aging ministry. Christ said to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers. Pray for the zeal and passion to do the work. Mr. Franks said he appreciates the service of all the elders. He said there is no higher calling than serving God's people.

### **Media and Communications Services**

Larry Salyer, Media and Communications Services operation manager, said he is excited about the mission we have to do. He compared the number of members to the 6.6 billion people in the world and said even 750,000 *Good News* magazines would be a drop in the bucket. He said that's why we saw the need to reexamine what we are doing to see how to do it better, to reach more people more effectively. Matthew 24:14 tells us the gospel will be preached, so we can have that assurance. John 4:35 tells us to lift up our eyes—it takes vision, Mr. Salyer said.

Far and away the most powerful tool for communicating with people is the Internet, he said. What would the apostle Paul have given for that? Mr. Salyer praised the work Peter Eddington and Aaron Booth have done in producing and advertising our existing Web sites. Now we need to go further. In meetings with talented young Web professionals around the country, he is being told that we must move into the ranks of the major Internet players and become the go-to site for anything related to the Bible. We need to hone our message to cut through the noise in the marketplace. We need to train the next generation of writers.

Mr. Salyer quoted from Herbert W. Armstrong's editorial policy and said it is even more relevant today. The world doesn't want biblical information, but needs the solutions the Bible gives. We need to provide shorter, relevant, engaging content to reach people on the Web. For example, Mr. Salyer mentioned that prototypes of short "sermons for the world" are being prepared.

Our goal is maximum impact/maximum exposure, Mr. Salyer said, and that can only be achieved with optimism and zeal.

## **Ballot Results**

An outside auditing firm oversaw the ballot counting, and Mr. Dick read the preliminary ballot results at the end of the day.

The General Conference of Elders selected Paul Kieffer (international) and Aaron Dean, Darris McNeely and Robin Webber to the Council of Elders.

The Strategic Plan was ratified with 287 yes and 72 no.

The Operation Plan was ratified with 280 yes and 79 no.

The budget was ratified with 270 yes and 91 no.

The Amendment to Bylaws 12.2.2.11 and 12.2.2.12 (allowing statements of support for amendments to be included with the call and notice packet) was approved. The other four proposed amendments were not approved.

The resolution to rescind the 2007 GCE vote to relocate the home office to Texas was approved with 186 yes and 176 no.

## **Monday Seminars**

May 19 elders and wives were able to attend a number of workshops based on the theme of going on to perfection. All participants and home office staff members were invited to a presentation on “What Strategic Planning Is All About” by Michael Wilkinson of Leadership Strategies, the company that facilitated the Council in developing the new Strategic Plan.

Other workshops were “The Spiritually Mature Congregation,” “Pitfalls to Godly Wisdom,” “Ministerial Calling—Maturing Relationships,” “Planning for Loss,” “Computers: The Basics and Beyond” and “Elder’s Wives Workshop.”

Mike Bennett

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