

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
Aug. 14, 2008—Milford, Ohio

On the final day of the August meetings, the Council, after much discussion, asked for more time to consider the options presented by the president on the “how do we proceed from here” proposal. Between now and the December meetings, Clyde Kilough will compile and then present to the Council the premises for facilities-based training.

The Council also discussed the “alternate forum,” and chose to remand the surrounding issues to the Ethics Committee for further discussion. In other business, a resolution setting a timetable for the annual performance assessments of the president, treasurer and secretary was approved.

Council Decision on “How Do We Proceed From Here?”

Robert Dick began the discussion by noting the administration had presented three options for the Council to review. Two questions had to now be determined: Is the Council satisfied that the three options define the breadth and scope of what we need from the administration; and if the answer is yes, then which option does the Council want the president to pursue?

The Council responded that even though the options initially provided the necessary information, it would like more time for review before coming down on the side of a particular option. Some proposed that ideas from one option could be included in another option and offered to send those ideas and other suggestions—such as an efficiency space study done on the property—to the president.

Mr. Dick commented that since the Council was adding suggestions to the existing options, that come December, the Council still needs to be prepared to stand by one of the options. As the discussion proceeded, many stated the need to reexamine the original premise of why we needed to have on-site housing for our training programs.

For those involved with ABC over the years, it was mentioned that after every class graduation there were discussions as to how the ABC experience could be improved. A solution was to have on-site facilities that could allow for immersion education, with an emphasis on character development. If we are going to raise the level of the ABC experience, it needs to be more than just a commuter school.

By way of reminder, Mr. Dick mentioned that in the meetings with Leadership Strategies, the priority of the strategies was determined by a prioritization exercise, and in this exercise one strategy received the highest priority from all participants in the exercise. That strategy was labeled as follows: “Develop a comprehensive training program for ministerial candidates, including facilities...” He asked if this strategy needs to be reaffirmed by the new Council.

Richard Pinelli remarked that 80 percent of what the original Ministerial Leadership Training Task Force had recommended, we have tried to enact in all the ways we could. The 20 percent that is left has not been possible because we can't bring in the men for a sustained time period because of the lack of residential facilities. Currently, men come in for a six-week training program (two weeks at a time, three times a year), but the most optimal environment would be to have what occurred with one couple who was brought in for nine months. This couple was able to take ABC classes, and then in the evenings and on weekends was given further training. This was the model for immersion training.

Some noted that they understand the need for residences as an important aspect of the strategy for immersion training. The question was posed as to how much immersion is necessary, especially in comparison to the costs involved. What kind of area do we need? Do we need a whole campus?

Mr. Dick pointed out that a number of memos came in asking if we were attempting to re-create Ambassador College. Even in the late 1990s, the Council knew this was not realistic because of cost. He said that if the Council decides it is necessary to have facilities for training, we must communicate that it is not going to be a re-creation of Ambassador College. We fully understand this is cost prohibitive.

Several Council members indicated the necessity for the premises of the original study to be presented again and examined. Mr. Kilough said he would be willing to come back to the Council in December with the premises and reasons for facilities-based training. This will be the first phase of what will be called a strategic facilities study.

The “Alternate Forum” Discussion

In the agenda for the August meetings, this topic was originally scheduled to be held in executive session. By majority vote, the session was changed to open session.

Mr. Kilough began the discussion by emphasizing the purpose for addressing this topic is to heal relationships within the GCE as some have become polarized over this issue, and trust has to be regained. He noted that such an alternate forum is not just a matter of friends exchanging ideas with one another, but he was referring to an organized, controlled forum that has a selective process for selective purposes.

The knowledge of such a forum, he said, has become problematic, in that openness and transparency is thwarted by such a vehicle. He has heard numerous elders express their opinion that it violates scriptural principles and the ethical principles we have agreed to as a ministry.

He also noted that the issue before the Council is not so much establishing that such a forum exists—that can be confirmed—but rather in dealing with its effects upon the GCE.

He continued to note that loose information (rumor) takes on a life of its own unless it can be put to rest. He formally asked the Council to take on this discussion and determine what ethical standards should be put into place, and to come to a conclusion that will resolve this matter.

A number of Council members said they appreciated that this topic was discussed in open session. The following are some other comments:

- We need to think in terms of showing trust to our fellow ministers. An approach we can take as a Council is to be as open as we can, so that we can reflect openness and transparency to the ministry.
- We are talking about an issue of trust here. A natural question nonparticipants have asked is how does one get on such a forum? Why are some invited and others are not? What is being talked about that can't be openly discussed?
- We currently have policies that govern the Elder's Forum and e-mail, but if some are gun-shy from commenting any longer because of being taken to task by other elders, where do those men go for logical communication outside of those realms?
- We have to be careful not to act on rumors or circumstantial evidence. There are new technologies today such as "Facebook forums" that offer many avenues for communication. A freedom we enjoy in this country is the freedom of speech.

Mr. Kilough clarified that the issue before the Council is not about private communications, but of an organized forum that excludes some and invites others. This goes beyond just the normal communication between friends. Along with freedoms, we have responsibilities toward one another according to 1 Corinthians 13.

As the discussion continued, the analysis that originated by the Council in 1996 was brought forward, which simply stated that one of the biggest historical problems in the Church is that we have not always treated each other in a godly manner. This statement concluded a discussion of ethics that took place during the Council meetings in Birmingham, Alabama, in April 1996.

Mr. Kilough said that the "Birmingham statement" needs to really become a spiritual mandate, and not just a statement. He asked that the Ethics Committee take the topic of trust and move on it as a spiritual issue that needs resolution in overall terms of our ability to relate with one another, both in organizational cultural terms and personally as Christians.

Mr. Dick noted that since committee work involves considerable brainstorming, that it would be good for the committee to have all materials and notes from the Birmingham conference and that the committee focus on how we can institutionally move forward on this.

Annual Performance Assessment of Officers

Bill Eddington, chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee, discussed the need to have a timetable for the annual assessments of the president, secretary and treasurer. After the Council discussed when these assessments could best take place, the following resolution was introduced and was unanimously approved.

“Whereas, the Council of Elders wishes to regularize the schedule for the assessment of the performance of the President, Secretary and Treasurer,

“Now it is hereby resolved that,

“All performance assessments shall be conducted annually following the first full year of service according to the following schedule:

“(1) The performance assessment of the President shall take place two scheduled Council meetings prior to the anniversary of each year of service.

“(2) The performance assessment of the Secretary and Treasurer shall be conducted during the Council of Elders meeting held in August of each year.”

Other Business

Mr. Eddington had originally proposed during the May meeting that the international areas provide information twice a year to the Council so that the Council could be better informed of the status and needs in those areas.

Since the May meetings, some questions had arisen as to what would be on the reports and what areas would combine their information. A sample report form was provided to the Council. A standardized form was recommended so the reports coming to the Council and to Ministerial Services would be the same.

A formal request from the chairman will be made to Ministerial Services to discuss the format and content of the international report form.

Finally, the GCE Planning Task Force had been requested to take up the study of the frequency of the GCE meetings and the issue of subsidizing elders' expenses for the meetings. The Task Force agreed to take on the study and will report their findings back to the Council.

Mr. Dick noted that all the items listed on the agenda had been addressed and formally adjourned the August meetings.

John Foster
Council Reporter

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