

**United Church of God, an International Association
Council of Elders Meeting Report
Feb. 23, 2009 (part 2)—Milford, Ohio**

President's Report (Continuing Monday's Report)

**Where Do We Go From Here? (The Importance of Immersion Education in
Relationship to Future Planning)**

Mr. Kilough began by pointing out that the administration was asked at the August 2008 Council of Elders meeting to “prove the premise” that immersion education is the most effective way to address one of the key strategic questions we face: “How will we approach our long-term education programs?”

The following comments were from his report to the Council. Mr. Kilough emphasized: “This report does not deal with where, when or how, but with what and why: what is the best, the optimal, way to fulfill our education needs, and why?”

While our education programs target every person in the Church at some level, two areas in particular are absolutely vital to the future spiritual health of God's people: 1) ministerial and pastoral training, both domestic and international, and 2) grounding the next generation in the knowledge and character of God.

We are at a crossroads, Mr. Kilough said, and we have been driving up to this intersection for a number of years. We are there now, and we have to make decisions. If we don't make decisions, we'll still be at the stop sign next year. Once we determine “what” and “why,” we are positioned to figure out how, where and when, and to commit to a course of appropriate action.

The Fundamental Premise:

Education can take many avenues, but that does not mean all roads lead to the same results, or have the same effectiveness in the end. Mr. Kilough asked if anything is more vital in life than the knowledge of God and His way of life. How important is it for our pastors to be as effective as possible in their profession and calling to help God's people grow in that grace and knowledge? How critical is it to have young people who are on a fast track of learning God's way and growing in godly character, in order for them to be pillars in the Church and to sow in them the seeds for future leadership roles?

Mr. Kilough answered that we must recognize and develop the most effective educational programs possible. Lofty goals cannot, and should not, be met with inferior efforts. The premise that our education programs for both pastors and ABC students are best accomplished in an intensive, holistic environment is based on academic research, long-term and short-term experience, and biblical examples.

The Concept of “Immersion Education”

“Immersion education” is a term that came first from language-learning theory based on understanding that a student learns a foreign language far more quickly and accurately when immersed in a setting that is not only a classroom component but a 24-hour environment. We began employing this term three years ago as we began to focus on two strategically critical areas: youth education and pastoral training.

Mr. Kilough further stated that as we developed an outcomes-based approach to evaluating ABC, the main result we wanted to see in our graduates was character development based on the godly knowledge they were receiving. This outcome is nothing new to the Church’s cultural thinking, of course. However, when we assessed the effectiveness of ABC in helping students achieve this end, we realized that our program lacked one of the important elements of impact—environment. The “commuter school” approach simply does not offer the holistic environment in which character is best developed.

Furthermore, we simultaneously focused on pastoral development to meet the looming need to replace an aging ministry, and to provide the best professional ministry in order to meet the increasing spiritual challenges the Church members face. Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the Church’s past training methods led to the conclusion that effective pastoral development must be 1) organized and structured, 2) consistently applied and 3) through skilled personal teaching. Without a centralized program these points simply cannot be achieved “in the field,” nor be achieved in a timely manner. Immersion training, however, would accelerate the preparation of pastors and wives, and provide thorough, consistent training.

What Supports This Concept?

1. The biblical examples:

The Bible offers examples of the immersion principle, beginning with the idea that the home should be an environment where each child’s parents continually use the daily teaching opportunities to engrave God’s way of life into his or her character (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). Christ developed His disciples for 3½ years, walking with them and teaching them daily, not only biblical truth but helping them to develop their character. Later, Paul taught Timothy and others in an in-depth, personal teaching environment.

2. Our modern Church experiences:

The historical lessons of our modern experience also point to the value of immersion education. In 1946 God led Mr. Armstrong to certain conclusions based on the experiences of the previous decade. One was doctrinal, the understanding that we need to keep the Feast of Tabernacles away from our homes in temporary dwellings. This had a significant impact on the Church’s spiritual development. Coming “out of the world” for

eight days and being immersed in the worship, teaching, social and activity environment; surrounded 24/7 by others of like mind, maximizes the impact God intends the Feast to serve. How much does this immersion experience impact the lives of God's people every year? Imagine life if the Feast were still kept only with evening services in local areas.

Furthermore, Mr. Armstrong learned the vital lesson that without a well-trained ministry, local congregations will flounder, if not disappear. He understood the vital need for formal education, not only for preparing a ministry, but for grounding all students in God's way of life. "Ambassador College is a character-building institution," was a hallmark phrase that emerged, and one that we still use today. It could not attain that goal through classes only. It required the work, dorm and social life that existed within that environment, as well as the close faculty-student relationships.

3. Our youth education experiences:

We also see the value and impact of immersion education in other arenas of the Church. The success of the United Youth Camp program can only be attributed to the ability to take our children out of the world for a week and put them into a special environment carefully designed to help them learn and practice God's way of life. "The Zone," as we call it, is defined as the environment in which God can change lives. Can God change their lives in other environments? Of course He could. But can it be done more effectively, and more quickly, and with greater chances of success, in this immersion program? If not, then why not just run local day camps focusing on activities?

4. Our ABC experiences:

How about those closest to the current Ambassador Bible Center program—the faculty and students? Mr. Kilough said the ABC staff has discussed on numerous occasions the disadvantages of the "commuter school" concept. Is the goal of creating a holistic environment to control character? Of course not—the goal is to help develop character in an environment that promotes right choices, positive peer support and godly leadership. Environment does count in character development, especially in the younger, more formative years.

5. The academic world's experiences:

The value of this approach has been verified even in the secular world. In 2004 George D. Kuh and Paul D. Umbach published the results of a study titled, "College and Character: Insights From the National Survey of Student Engagement."

"Institutions should intentionally create opportunities for students inside and outside the classroom to integrate their experiences in a manner that nurtures character development. Indeed, it takes a whole campus to develop a student's character" (p. 51).

While virtually all universities and colleges allow off-site housing, many require on-site housing for first-year students, and strongly urge that they stay there for their

entire time. This one quote from the Chico State University handbook captures the essence of the value of immersion education:

“The on-campus housing program encourages personal growth in a residential setting and provides a climate where the living atmosphere complements the educational mission of the university.”

A *Time* magazine article in October 2008—“Education—a Frosh New Start. College Gets Warm and Fuzzy for the Harry Potter Generation”—covered a new trend in education. It focused on Vanderbilt University and its desire to develop a cultural setting for learning among the new freshmen. The article observes that many colleges around the country are seeing and returning to the value of putting students into a societal environment so that they affect the whole person and not simply pass on knowledge.

6. Our own sense of experience:

Mr. Kilough presented an analogy with which we are all familiar; keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. If you are unable to attend all or part of the Feast, can you still keep it? Of course. If you keep it at home, and you are supplied with 10 sermon DVDs, will you get more out of it than if you have none? Of course. But if you attend the Feast with others, and even if everyone is scattered in many different housing facilities, but you are attending live services, having fellowship and enjoying all the activities, will you get even more benefit from that environment? Of course. And if you attend a self-contained Feast site, where all the members are staying in one place, sharing all meals and never having to scatter, would you benefit even more from that total immersion environment? Of course. This is one of the great benefits to sites such as in Argentina and Italy—the total immersion for eight days maximizes the impact.

Ministerial/Pastoral Development:

Mr. Kilough said we’ve seen the stats for years now, showing the demographics of the ministry. The looming numbers of retirees, potential health problems and increased workloads beg for implementing an aggressive training program for future pastors. If we don’t train new pastors in larger numbers than one or two per year, we will find ourselves in serious trouble in three to five years. In short order we could have as many as 10 men lost to the full-time ministry in a single year. And once we fall behind by as many as eight or 10 men in one year, it will be extremely difficult to catch up. We will be combining churches, dropping churches, trying to provide an elder to speak on occasion with the pastor showing up once a month or less often.

We have proven over many years that when we have resident pastors in congregations, visiting and interacting with the members, the congregation thrives. When we don’t, the members hold on, but there is often a serious lack of spiritual growth and even numerical growth. Brethren tire of DVDs on the Sabbath or having an elder visit only occasionally. They want a pastor who will be their friend and interact with them. This is our dilemma today. If we do not take the steps to do what is necessary to

effectively train new ministers and further educate our current ministry, we will find ourselves struggling to maintain what we have rather than looking forward to a bright future.

The challenge is not only replacing pastors, but how do you replace their years of experience and professionalism? We must have a new line of pastors coming on board who are thoroughly trained in everything ranging from doctrine to effective speaking to wise counseling and all the other hats pastors are required to wear today.

Mr. Kilough then highlighted the crisis in leadership in the international areas.

Canada is growing, but the average age of their employed pastors is 65. Where will future pastors come from? Within five years there will be few pastors available in Canada without help from the United States. No one in Canada has the time to devote to ministerial training and education.

South Africa has a burgeoning work that is growing in areas like Zambia and Zimbabwe. They believe they must have help from the United States within the next five years or the situation will also be untenable. They, too, have no structured plan for training new ministers, plus, no one really has the time. The current age of the ministry there is 65.

In Central, East and West Africa the idea of “senior pastors” from the United States is a good one for the time being. But in order to have good, solid growth in these regions, we need an aggressive training program. It is very difficult to help them out of the problems of their setting and culture without training men and women for the future. The senior pastors already have congregations in the United States and other assignments, and they have little opportunity for such training. Without effective training, we are in for a very difficult time in Africa.

Asia, particularly India, is an area really beginning to grow, but how can one man handle such a vast region? We desperately need younger men who have the biblical knowledge, people skills and training in international areas of the world.

The United Kingdom faces serious challenges. All the congregations are pastored by elders, whose average age is in the 60s, and who also have other jobs. They are well-intentioned and good-hearted, but who has the time or training themselves to develop the leadership for the future? Without intervention and an aggressive training program that will provide hope for the future, there is every reason to believe their situation could rapidly deteriorate.

The Philippines is a fast-growing part of the world, with church attendance increasing by 10 to 15 percent a year. The handful of full-time ministers and office staff are currently handling the workload, but who is planning for the future? Where will the future ministers come from? Where do we go when they can no longer do the job?

Australia seems to be in the best shape, and thanks to Bill Bradford, it now has an aggressive program for training future leaders, but they are just keeping up with their own needs.

Eastern Europe and Scandinavia is a slowly developing area, thanks to having a dedicated senior pastor and elder. This area is in the early stages of development and it will no doubt take a while for the work to grow, so things may seem less critical there than other areas of the world. But we also have to consider the long-term needs there.

Joel Meeker is overwhelmed with his responsibilities as more congregations spring up in Africa, to say nothing of the rest of the French-speaking members scattered around the world. We need to train young men and women for service in these and other remote parts of the world.

In Latin America, the full-time pastors' average age is 57. However, many of them carry above-average loads. How long can they continue at a pace that is wearing on them? There are potential strong leaders who could emerge in Latin America, but they will need training. One of Leon Walker's greatest concerns has been the lack of good training for most of the men who are already pastors. Who and how will new pastors get that necessary education?

Mr. Kilough said we can help—if we have an effective training program in place. However, there are no long-term plans in place for pastoral development in South Africa, the United Kingdom, Italy, Latin America, Canada, New Zealand, the Philippines or Eastern Europe. If we do not plan to train more ministers, we will drop further and further behind in all areas of the world.

Mr. Kilough also addressed the question of whether elders could fill the void. As part of the research for this presentation, Ministerial Services surveyed the elders not employed by the Church to determine the potential pool of pastoral replacements. This survey was designed to ascertain the facts in order to plan as accurately as possible.

The conclusion from the survey was that out of 253 elders, 134 submitted a response, and of that figure, we have a total of eight men who are interested in working full-time for the Church who are under 60 years of age and willing to relocate. If we hire all these men, our pastoral needs can be filled for the next two to three years (assuming a retirement rate of two to three a year). After that, without developing, educating and training younger men, our primary source for the full-time ministry will essentially be exhausted. It is very important that we begin to identify younger men who are not yet ordained and provide them with the education and training that will make them viable candidates for the pastoral ministry in the next five to 10 years.

How do we best train new pastors? Mr. Kilough said many will have not attended Ambassador College or ABC, and will require more formal biblical training. Would any of us say that pastoring God's people is going to get easier, that the needs won't be greater? Tough times demand well-prepared pastors. Problems do not decrease in severity

proportionate to the pastor's experience. Some things are challenging to the most seasoned veteran, but are overwhelming to a novice. Effective speech training would help their speaking and, thus, their impact. Counseling training would help their counseling and, thus, their impact. Doctrinal training would help ensure we speak the same thing, thus their impact and unity.

We never had consistent, formal pastoral training in our modern history, but it's probably what we needed the most over the decades. Originally, men were AC trained, sent out, and they learned purely by experience. Later, after pastors were established, men were sent to be trained under pastors, but that training varied greatly, with greatly varied results. Rushing people into pastoring without adequate training is asking for trouble. In such cases, sparing expense for proper training ends up costing a lot more in the long term, not only financially, but in spiritual damage to the Church.

Pastoring is tougher than ever, life is more challenging than ever, and the Church will need skilled, competent pastors more than ever. Developing and investing in an immersion program for pastoral training is an investment in the spiritual state of the Church in the future. Immersion training is the singular most effective way to insure we have men well-prepared, by well-experienced teachers, in a thorough, consistent and unified manner, for stepping into the places of retiring pastors.

Our current pastoral training programs are helpful. But weekend, four- to five-day leadership training seminars and even our six-week training sessions fall short of fulfilling our needs. Even some of the experienced pastors who have attended the six-week program say it does not offer enough time to adequately address all areas of their concerns, much less meet the total needs of newly hired pastors.

In conclusion, Mr. Kilough stated that you can teach knowledge over the Internet or in writing, but how can you effectively teach counseling, people skills, speaking approaches, etc., without a hands-on teaching approach in a structured environment? Otherwise you are assigning men the responsibility to care for God's people without knowing how they will react or what they really know about the job. The debate isn't over immersion, but how much immersion is necessary.

Given the needs and circumstances of both groups, the immersion/holistic environment provides the optimal opportunity to accomplish the outcomes we want to see. Other avenues of education are fine for simply passing on knowledge, but the core issue for both future pastors and future young pillars in the Church is character development.

If our educational programs are only, or primarily, for the purpose of passing on knowledge, then we can find other ways. But we have a higher purpose—character building and pastoral development. If we want to effectively achieve these things, we need to put people in the holistic environment in which they can best be accomplished, and we must invest appropriately. Immersion education is truly an investment in the long-term strength and stability of the United Church of God.

Mr. Kilough then recommended that we continue to use the current pool of elders who meet our criteria to fulfill our needs for the next three years. In the meantime we must aggressively seek out younger men with ministerial potential for training and development for future use in the full-time ministry, and develop our strategy for providing proper facilities for our education programs of all sorts. In the interim years we could initiate a savings plan as income permits along with an active facilities fund for members to contribute to.

The Proposed Budget for 2009-2010

Treasurer Jason Lovelady began his presentation by remarking that a large company in the United States is so uncertain of their future that they chose not to release to the public and to their own stockholders any forward-looking earnings statements. He proceeded to ask how this level of economic uncertainty impacts us, especially in the context of preparing the budget—and despite the many predictions, no one knows for certain how long the recession will last.

Mr. Lovelady said that it is important that we budget conservatively and that we have appropriate levels of cash reserves. He also said that we need to build flexibility within the budget to be able to respond quickly to any volatile swings in income that we could see over the next 18 months. Currently, income is 2.3 percent higher than last fiscal year. That is in improvement over December when we were only 1 percent higher.

In quoting from Robert Dick's cover letter to the elders about the February meetings, Mr. Lovelady read that "last year when we changed to objectives-based strategic planning, it required us to 'budget to a plan.' We are now expected to establish our strategic priorities and then allocate budget based on the importance we assign to the task."

Therefore, Mr. Lovelady pointed out that the two highest priorities identified in the current Strategic Plan are the following: 1. New pastoral training program: develop a comprehensive training program for ministerial candidates, including facilities for the development of pastoral candidates to meet our current and future needs. 2. Web site development: develop interactive Web sites to increase visitor loyalty and develop a Web marketing plan to attract first-time Web site visitors.

The proposed budget, Mr. Lovelady said, reflects this by the continuation of Ministerial Services' current ministerial development program plus the set aside of \$130,000 into a facilities fund that will be a fundamental part of an expanded ministerial development and ABC program. The budget also reflects the importance of Web development by the reallocation of media funds to that area. As future Web plans and media mix strategies are developed and refined, more media dollars will be allocated to preaching the gospel via the Web.

Mr. Lovelady proceeded to the budget highlights:

The proposed budget is \$24,250,000. That represents a 1 percent decrease from last year's budget of \$24,500,000. The current fiscal year is projected to finish between \$23,750,000 and \$24,000,000.

The budget includes hiring three employees in Media and three field ministers, as well as providing for an increase in member assistance.

Mr. Lovelady recommended that the cost of living adjustment (COLA) of \$212,000, the \$550,000 allocation for the building program and the \$150,000 for the TV airtime feasibility study, still remain on hold until June. If income remains the same or increases, then the COLA could be given out as a one-time adjustment at that time. Any other surplus would be split 50 percent between unrestricted cash reserves and a facilities fund.

The proposed budget includes another 2.5 percent COLA. But it will be given out in the last quarter. Hopefully, by next year, there will be better understanding of the economy, Mr. Lovelady said.

For the remainder of the presentation, Mr. Lovelady proceeded to discuss the expenses for each class and for each account for each department. He said that there is \$300,000 built into the budget that will allow for flexibility depending on the direction of the economy. The proposed media mix costs are also included in the budget as well.

John Foster
Council Reporter

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