

United Church of God, an International Association
Council of Elders Meeting Report
Feb. 26, 2009—Milford, Ohio

On this final day of the February meetings, the Council was able to resolve a number of remaining agenda items. First on the agenda was a report from Victor Kubik on an Ethics Committee retreat that took place in November 2008. Later, Robert Dick led the Council in a discussion concerning ethical standards for balloting.

Ethics Retreat Discussion

The chair of the Ethics Committee, Mr. Kubik, reiterated a statement that focused upon a strategic conclusion the Council reached in 1996: “We, in the Church of God, have not always handled our relationships and responsibilities in a godly manner.” In November 2008 the committee, along with Mr. Dick, met to discuss this issue and to come up with solutions and recommendations.

For two days the committee reviewed all the material that the Council has produced on this topic. Mr. Kubik said that the “soft issues are the hard issues.” This is especially true when dealing with human feelings and relationships. After the second day, it became obvious that there was still a lot of work to be done.

The committee recommended that the entire Council be involved in a future retreat to discuss both the issue and solutions we can initiate. Mr. Kubik said that if we as God’s ministers can’t solve these problems, who can? The Church will be better off for it when we do. The Council was encouraged to read the book *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen M.R. Covey.

Mr. Kubik proposed that the Council could meet for three days after the Council meeting in May, since all members would be here already. The planned retreat was adopted by the Council for May 10-12, 2009.

Ethical Standards for Balloting

The purpose for this discussion, Mr. Dick explained, was that nine e-mails had recently come in asking the Council to address the ethical standards for balloting prior to this year’s GCE meeting. He said that this Council has rarely ignored issues that were brought before it, and these letters were sent in the context of the serious concern over proper conduct in the balloting process. Mr. Dick began by drawing attention to portions of the letters sent to the GCE prior to the 2007 and 2008 meetings.

Mr. Holladay mentioned that he had gone through the Council minutes of when ethical standards about balloting had been discussed. In all cases, he said that the main things to avoid were lobbying and using undue influence. Human politicking is of a wrong spirit and approach. But, he also asked, how does one gather information in order

to make intelligent choices about who should be considered to be on the Council? In the multitude of counsel there is safety. But, he said, to go around and get people to vote for someone—that would be wrong.

One suggestion presented by Robin Webber was to send a letter that validates what many have been doing right, and that we do condemn bloc voting.

Richard Pinelli reminded the Council that in the early years of United, we would dismiss and go pray about the decisions. We thought the process of choosing men for the Council would be a private exercise. Now, we have come to the point where we see some people openly criticizing the president, the administration—“beating our fellow servants.” We have to remove ourselves from that wrong approach.

Mr. Kilough said that we have struggled to attain the level of unity advocated in 1 Corinthians 1—it is a lofty ideal. We now have confusion and different opinions and practices. One danger we have inherent in our government system, as the Seventh-day Adventists at their headquarters in 1996 warned us, is partisan politics. We have to be extra cautious to avoid that.

He pointed out that in Matthew 20, two of the disciples banded together to try to attain a position. It doesn't matter the number, it is the principle. It angered the other 10, and it led to terrible competition, for which Christ rebuked them. They didn't know really what they were doing, but their politics led to strife and not to peace.

Mr. Kilough further stated that many elders still believe the original understanding that this a private matter. If there is anything other than that—we cross the line. Do we really want a Council member telling an elder about the job performance of a fellow Council member? If we do, we go down a dangerous road. We will be in danger of compromising people and their reputations.

In referring to the study paper titled “Balloting in the Church,” Darris McNeely noted that in Acts 6, members were to seek out men from among them to serve. The members must have had a method of discussing this before making those recommendations. As a pastor, he said that he always consults other elders and deacons before performing an ordination. Hopefully we come to the unity of faith. He said that he fully supports the principles of ethical conduct.

Aaron Dean said that we all answer to God in what we do. At times when it looks like God is losing, He wins. God never loses. Mr. Dick remarked that we often wish God would win earlier, but in the end, nobody thwarts the justice of God.

Bill Eddington asked Mr. Dick to encourage the GCE members to call and talk to the Council members. He said that when he was originally nominated, he had been an unknown, and thought a number of e-mails would have come in asking him questions. He said that he didn't see how we could legislate or limit communications. Yet, any

comment one makes about someone else can exert a level of influence. Mr. Dick mentioned that over the years we have reminded the GCE to contact the nominees.

In some final thoughts on this topic, Mr. Kubik said that when United started, we never had a ballot system before. He wondered if we knew what we were doing. Is this the best way—to have every elder in the Church ballot for someone to be on the Council? Our system does have flaws. First, we had many names of elders from which to choose, and now we have a list of only those who put forward their own names for nomination. He said we have chosen an imperfect system. However, it is within this system that our hearts are tested. It is a test down deep of our character and honesty.

Mr. Dick thanked the members for their input and thoughts. He proposed sending a letter to the GCE. A draft letter about ethical standards for balloting will be crafted and sent to the Council for their review. The Council approved the plan, and the GCE can expect a letter on this topic coming soon.

Other Business

GCE Planning:

David Register reviewed the schedule for the annual GCE meeting in May. The invitation letters to the GCE will be sent out shortly. The scheduled international reports will be from Italy, Latin America, Nigeria, Australia and South Africa. There will be various workshops based on the theme: “Making Disciples—a Whole Church Effort.”

Mr. Dick presented to the Council a document from conference planner Charles Melear, titled “GCE Annual Expense Recommendations,” and asked the Council to remand to the president all requests for GCE reimbursement approvals this year. He also recommended that in the May meetings, the Council begin to formalize a policy for GCE subsidy requests. The Council approved this recommendation.

International Area Reports:

On the original agenda, Mr. Eddington had sent the Council a number of written reports presented from the international areas that will be part of Council business twice a year. He asked for more feedback as to the format and information provided, and mentioned that he had arranged with Ministerial Services to collect these reports. The international area reports will be brought back on the agenda for the May meetings.

Proposed Amendment:

Mr. Eddington, along with other Council members, had proposed in December an amendment concerning Article 7.5.3. Based on recommendations from the Amendment Committee, this proposed amendment will not be going forward this year. He said the amendment will be restructured for submission next year.

Council Agenda Document:

During the evening session, the Council remanded the “Procedure—Council of Elders Regular Meetings Agenda” document back to Mr. Eddington for editing. The Council adopted the revised document with 11 in favor; Robert Dick abstained.

Assessment of the President:

Mr. Dick asked if the Council should go into executive session for the assessment of the president, which is due at the February meeting. The ensuing discussion focused mainly on how the Council had not had a chance to have an internal discussion of the assessment and agree to its recommendations for the president. Paul Kieffer suggested that the Council, without the president being present, may wish to present three action steps for the president to accomplish.

Mr. Eddington mentioned that we may have to tweak some of the assessment procedures, but that would not affect the recently approved assessment document. It was suggested that the first session of assessment should be without the president to identify the issues and present action plans. The second session would include the president, in which he could receive the unified assessment. The Council agreed to postpone the president’s assessment to the May meetings, where it would be a high priority.

Good Works Program:

Mr. Kilough asked the Council to rescind the resolution that first created the Good Works program, so a new program could be developed that would allow donations and fund-raising for activities not meeting the strict definition of “emergency need.” A task force comprised of Clyde Kilough, Jim Franks, Jason Lovelady, Victor Kubik and Roy Holladay will present a program proposal to the Council for approval. The current Good Works program will continue operating until a new plan is proposed and approved. The following resolution was unanimously approved:

Resolution for Good Works Program:

Whereas, the administration of the United Church of God desires a more broadly defined Good Works program that would allow donations and fund-raising for activities not meeting the strict definition of “emergency need,” and

Whereas, the Good Works program was created by resolution of the Council on August 14, 2003, and such resolution must be rescinded in order to develop a new program,

Now therefore, it is hereby resolved, that the resolution of August 14, 2003, creating the Good Works program is rescinded and

It is further resolved that a new program will be created under the direction of the president and treasurer for the development of Good Works projects, and

It is further resolved that the president will appoint a task force that will include representation from the Council and the administration to develop the parameters for the new program, and

It is further resolved that Good Works will continue to function under the oversight of the treasurer while a new program is being developed.

Restructuring of Committees

Mr. Dick noted that the Council needs to follow Bylaw Article 8.8.1 in populating the committees. Secretary David Johnson provided a ballot in which the majority of the Council would give approval for each man to serve on a particular committee. Each committee chooses its own chairman. The Media Committee chose Darris McNeely as chair. The following are the realignments of the committees (*denotes chair):

Doctrine: Robert Berendt, Paul Kieffer, Richard Pinelli* and Richard Thompson.

Ethics: Aaron Dean, Clyde Kilough, Victor Kubik*, Darris McNeely, Richard Pinelli, Richard Thompson and Robin Webber.

Media: Roy Holladay, Clyde Kilough, Victor Kubik, Darris McNeely* and Robin Webber.

Roles and Rules: Robert Berendt, Aaron Dean, Bill Eddington* and Paul Kieffer.

Executive: Aaron Dean, Robert Dick*, Clyde Kilough and Robin Webber.

Strategic Planning and Finance: Robert Berendt, Aaron Dean, Bill Eddington, Roy Holladay*, Paul Kieffer and Robin Webber.

Strategic Plan and Budget Finalization

Prior to approving the Strategic Plan and budget, Mr. Holladay raised an item of concern. He noted that the target number of subscriptions for *Good News* subscribers in the third year is only 350,000. He asked if we could increase that to 500,000. Mr. Kilough responded that since this is a third-year issue, it's likely the numbers will shift every year. Mr. Lovelady reiterated that in order to appropriate resources to the Web, we cannot simultaneously raise *GN* subscriptions to 500,000 in the third year and finance the proposed increase in Web presence.

Mr. Eddington noted that the annual renewal percentages could go higher as in Australia that sees up to 40 percent in renewals. Mr. Lovelady pointed out that we will probably need to manage our circulation levels over the next few years to no more than 400,000. We cannot now put in the budget the hiring of new Internet staff if we want to increase the *GN* circulation to above 400,000. This is a financial reality. The dollars are not currently there to do both.

Since money is limited and we are interested in quality subscribers, Mr. Dean suggested that we could offer just a trial three-month subscription, as many other

magazines are now doing. This would allow us to send out more subscriptions to more people in a year.

In looking at the critical success factors, Mr. Kieffer wondered if we could include a factor that states our ability to initiate interaction with our Web audience. The Web task force could present even more ideas on how we can improve that interaction.

Mr. Kubik pointed out that the incubation period on the Web is amazing. He said that some people have read our material on the Web for years. They are not on any kind of list, and suddenly they break through to the surface. In Scandinavia, we have contacts who have come from the Web. One man typed in, “What is the meaning of life?” on a search engine, found our Web sites and started reading our other literature.

We do have the ability to build relationships though the Web, Mr. Kilough said. In fact, that is the purpose and great ability of that tool. People are finding us through the Web. Regarding third-year subscription figures, he didn’t feel comfortable plugging in arbitrary figures that are not conservative. In this rapidly changing media world, the key to reaching the world is through the Web.

Mr. Eddington cited *Website* magazine, which is created for computer professionals. This magazine is also offered in print, and 95 percent of subscribers prefer to get it that way. We may find that the 350,000 figure is way below the responses we may receive simply through increased visitors to our Web sites. Mr. Kilough responded that with our proposed generation of 12 million new contacts on the Web, we also assume more donations will flow in as well to offset increases in subscriptions.

Mr. Lovelady noted that while we do have an increased strategic focus on the Web, we are approaching the reallocation of dollars to the Web in a measured way. He went on to say that print consumes 75 percent of this year’s media budget. In the proposed budget, we are only making a 7 percent change, which still allocates 68 percent to print media. So it hasn’t been a large shift in dollars away from print.

After more discussion, the Council recommended that the third-year figure for *GN* subscribers should rise from 350,000 to 400,000. Mr. Lovelady said he would feel comfortable with that figure.

Result of Ballots:

- Strategic Plan as proposed: In favor: 12.
- Operation Plan as proposed: In favor: 10. Abstain: 2—Paul Kieffer, Aaron Dean.
- Budget as proposed: In favor: 11. Abstain: 1—Paul Kieffer.

Committee Remands

“Where Do We Go From Here?” Proposal:

Mr. Holladay thanked the administration for all the work they had done in presenting the “where do we go from here?” proposals. He said the Council would like to have more time reviewing the three options from what had been proposed earlier, and the recent presentation of the premise for immersion education. He asked that this topic be remanded to the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee for further review. He said that something could be brought forward in May for Council review.

Mr. Dean considered this to be a good idea, and explained that a reason he had abstained in the ballot about the proposed Operation Plan was exactly how the “where do we go from here?” proposal fits into the plan. Mr. Webber said that after May, the administration needs to be receiving direction on how to proceed.

Mr. Kilough asked that the president, treasurer and operation managers be included in the discussions of the committee. Mr. Kieffer agreed that we need to have an inclusive approach in the committee meeting.

A motion to remand the related matters of “where do we go from here?” and the premise for immersion education to the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee with the president, treasurer and operation managers was approved with 11 in favor; Richard Pinelli abstained.

The Media Mix Proposal:

Mr. McNeely, chairman of the newly formed Media Committee, noted that there were some fine ideas in the proposed media mix plan. He also pointed out that television is now mentioned as both an objective and strategy in our Strategic Plan.

Mr. McNeely further stated that we do focus on money, but also on the human resources used in preaching the gospel. He said that as a presenter and writer, he understands the impact on the ministry and their time. Those resources, both human and budgetary, should be adequately funded. To insure this, he said that it is good to have other sets of eyes look at this media mix proposal.

Any plan we put forward, Mr. McNeely said, is presented with the intent that it receives the blessing from God. He said it is extremely important that we work together in unity to reap the blessings of God. That is the motivation.

The motion to remand the media mix proposal to the Media Committee for further review, and that a preliminary report be presented in May; was approved with 10 in favor; Robert Dick and Richard Pinelli abstained.

After thanking the Council for their work, Mr. Dick formally adjourned the February meetings.

John Foster
Council Reporter

-end-

© 2009 United Church of God, *an International Association*