

General Conference of Elders Meetings May 3-4, 2009—Cincinnati, Ohio

The theme of the 2009 Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Elders was “Making Disciples: A Whole Church Effort.” Beginning the weekend at a special Sabbath service May 2, Council Chairman Robert Dick gave a sermon on seven factors that affect the Church’s efforts to make disciples. In addition to the 447 elders, elders’ wives and others meeting at the Holiday Inn Eastgate, there were 70 congregations on phone hookups, 449 video Web connections, 37 English audio connections and four Spanish connections.

The business meeting of the General Conference of Elders began on Sunday morning, with Mr. Dick introducing the elders of the United Church of God ordained or credentialed since last year: Alfredo Arboleas, Andy Buchholz, Martin Cole, Dave DeHart, Barry Howdeshell, Mike Iiams, Barry Korthuis, Charles May, Peter McNair, Arnold Mendez Sr., Homer Moore, David Pavlik, Patrick Read, Jeff Richards, Phil Sandilands, John Trotter and David West.

Ballot Results

Mr. Dick then led the elders in balloting. 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 William Eddington (international), Scott Ashley, Melvin Rhodes and Richard Thompson to the Council of Elders.

The Strategic Plan was ratified with 253 votes yes and 46 no.

The Operation Plan was ratified with 243 yes and 51 no.

The budget was ratified with 235 yes and 54 no.

Keynote Address

After the balloting, President Clyde Kilough gave the keynote address and asked a question that seems to have many different answers in the world of religion: What does it mean to make disciples? A Google search returns huge numbers of sites dealing with the subject, but most operate from typical misunderstandings and assumptions, such as heaven and hell, this is the only day of salvation and that all people can become disciples now.

But the best place to find the answer is in the Scriptures, Mr. Kilough said. Matthew 28:18-20 says we are to baptize those who become disciples, which shows that making disciples is more than just preaching the gospel and spreading the seeds. In fact, becoming disciples is a lifelong process. John 4:1-2 shows that Jesus made disciples who then were instrumental in baptizing other disciples. Acts 13:48 shows that disciples have

to be “appointed to eternal life,” and verse 52 shows the results: “The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

The Greek word translated “make disciples” means to enroll as a pupil of a scholar. *Vine’s* says a disciple is an adherent, an imitator. The word *disciple* is only used in the Gospels and Acts, Mr. Kilough explained, and after that other words used to describe Christians can give us a fuller picture. They include: brother (which shows the bond we must have), saint (which shows God’s holiness and the holiness of His followers) and believer (which stresses our shared faith).

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) shows that the seeds growing in the good ground are those who understand. In John 8:31 Christ said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples” (New Revised Standard Version). Luke 14:26-27 shows we must love Christ more than all or we cannot be His disciples.

The word *make* doesn’t imply that making disciples is something totally in our control, Mr. Kilough explained. God controls the calling, the individual controls his response, but to a great degree we control the environment we create in the Church. He said we have a great model for making disciples: United Youth Camps. We work to create the Zone, which we define as “the environment in which God changes people’s lives.” Shouldn’t every person work to create the qualities of the Zone in every congregation? This is a very important aspect of the “whole Church effort” of making disciples. Every person in the Church should think about sharing the life-changing benefits of God’s way of life when he or she has the right opportunity. Mr. Kilough said that some of the most influential people when his family came into the Church were those who invited them to their homes, who shared their experiences, who were examples of faith.

Acts 2:41-47 demonstrates the environment in the early Church where those who gladly received Peter’s word were baptized and then shared the qualities of fellowship, joy and oneness of heart.

If you want a formula for making disciples, it is Acts 9:31, Mr. Kilough said. We need to exemplify to new disciples how to be peacemakers, how to edify one another (such as in speaking to build up others) and how to live in the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Christ stressed at His final Passover that we must love one another, which shows that we are His disciples (John 13:35). We are a work in progress. In the early years of the GCE Bob Dick said in a sermon, “We must *be* a work before we can *do* a work.” Likewise, we must *be* disciples before we can *make* disciples. In the Bible we are told to wait on God, but Mr. Kilough asked, “Are there times God has to wait on us?”

Mr. Kilough encouraged us all to be about our Father’s business, being better disciples ourselves, helping others become stronger disciples and preparing them for greater service.

International Reports

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

Carmelo Anastasi reported on the work of the Church in **Italy**. He mentioned that as a cost-saving measure the Italian *Good News* is now mailed only four times a year. They also produce newsletters for members and coworkers. He said that now 35 percent of new subscribers come through the Internet, and the Web site is the main low-cost promotional tool. In order to be more effective with Web searchers, the Church in Italy has a new approach on its Web site. We call ourselves a community of believers, and only mention the Church at the end.

Donations have stayed about the same, though some members have lost jobs. There are two congregations, in Milan and Catania, as well as two Bible studies, in Bergamo and Naples. The Church in Italy has a leadership program to prepare future leaders. The Church is small but has been blessed with two new members recently.

Mr. Anastasi explained the difficulty in following our doctrines in a society that is completely opposite of what we teach. He mentioned the strong move toward ecumenicalism in Italy. Those who don't accept the Catholic Church's overtures toward ecumenicalism are seen as sects. Mr. Anastasi said the Italian brethren are enduring, and they appreciate the prayers of the brethren around the world.

Saul Langarica reported on the work of the Church in 16 countries in **Latin America**. There are 19 ministers in the Spanish-speaking area (nine are employed by the Church) and 43 congregations. There are also 22 video and audio groups. Regional Director Leon Walker visits each area about twice a year.

There has been slow but constant growth in Latin America, from 865 baptized members in 1996 to 1,167 today. Attendance has gone from 1,754 in 1996 to 2,485 today. There were 44 baptisms in the region last year.

The Internet plays an important role for the Church in Latin America. Besides the Spanish *Good News* Web site, there is also a central Church Web site with local Web sites for each country with the same design and information as the central site, but with local information as well. There is also a site for the youth. They also use the Internet to transmit live services from Mexico and Chile. Our new elder from Argentina, Alfredo Arboleas, has introduced an innovative Web program that has made it possible for them in the same service to have a sermonette from Argentina, a sermon from Bolivia—or vice versa—while special music and the opening and closing prayers come from other areas!

Family relationships and delivery of extra magazines by members are key ways the gospel is spread in Latin America.

Mr. Langarica mentioned that the Santiago, Chile, congregation was growing so rapidly, they needed to build a building. Through the generosity of the brethren they were able to do this with no debt! He mentioned that they are beginning to fill the new hall already, and may have to have morning and afternoon services in the future!

Summer camps are held in Mexico, Guatemala and Chile. They also recently had leadership conferences in Chile and Guatemala and are sending ministers to the Pastoral Training Program at the home office. Plans are to offer some ABC classes in Guatemala.

Members in some areas face dangers, such as kidnapping. For example, one member in Mexico was kidnapped after the Feast and had to pay a ransom to be released. Please pray for the safety of the brethren.

Mr. Langarica said he believes our greatest work is ahead, and we need to learn to work together as never before.

Victor Kubik reported on **Nordic/Baltic/Eastern European** area. He called Johnnie Lambert, who volunteers his time to serve in the region, the “patron saint” of the area.

Mr. Kubik pointed out that Russian is the fifth-largest language in the world, so there is a large field in front of them. He gave a number of statistics. They send out 1,600 *Good News* magazines, including two articles in the local language with each magazine. So far 220 have finished the Estonian *Bible Study Course*, and 100 are taking the *Bible Study Course* in Russian. At this point there are no local congregations, since the members are scattered throughout the region.

Mr. Kubik thanked many volunteers who have helped serve the region. For example, Linda Saar, a member in Ohio, has helped with layouts for the publications and Ryan Foster, a member in Oregon, has helped with Web work.

They will be greatly streamlining the *Good News* mailing, which has been handled by Mr. Lambert when he traveled to Estonia. It will now be handled from the home office.

Mr. Kubik mentioned the stories of several people in the region who have become interested in the United Church of God. The pastor of a Baptist church in Latvia has started keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days, and many of his congregation are keeping them as well. Other members have relocated to the region from the tropical jungles of Thailand. Mr. Kubik also mentioned a man who typed in “what is the meaning of life?” on a search engine and found us among others. (He said he liked our tone—that UCG was not shouting at him.)

Mr. Kubik also mentioned that Dan and Cindy Harper, who live in France, and a couple from Indianapolis helped with teaching English as second language to street children in Ukraine.

Bill Bradford reported on the work of the United Church of God in **Australia**. He said there are 14 elders and one ministerial trainee serving the country. Recently Grant Chick moved in from South Africa and Matt Sieff was hired as trainee. Steve Clark, who had been training with Mr. Bradford since 2002, took over Melbourne congregation and also travels to the growing area of Western Australia.

The Church in Australia has been growing. There are now 22 congregations (up from 16 with four video groups in 2004). Attendance is now 643 (up from 502 in 2004). The growth is like adding a small congregation of 28 people every year. There are now four Feast sites in Australia, and there has been a 28 percent increase in Festival attendance over last four years.

In the last 30 months there have been 55 baptisms, and of those, 62 percent have no Church of God background. Mr. Bradford also pointed out that that 69.1 percent of those were under age 50, and 52.7 percent were under age 35.

The Good News circulation has grown from 20,830 in 2004 to 37,017 this year. Now they are cutting back hard with renewals. Mr. Bradford also mentioned that Australia's Web site now has inquiry and comment opportunities to encourage visitors to have direct contact with the local pastors.

Tony Levy reported on the work of the Church in the eight countries of **Southern Africa** (currently we have no members in two of those, Namibia and Swaziland).

Morgen Kriedemann serves Johannesburg, South Africa, as well as Malawi and scattered members. André van Belkum serves Durban, South Africa, but will soon be moving to New Zealand. He is assisted by Neville Smith. Neil Becker serves East London, South Africa, and handles the office. Stan Botha serves Cape Town, South Africa.

We have two congregations in Malawi, the third-poorest country in world. We are helping with grants to help with education to improve the members' lives.

Attendance in Zambia is now about 300. They are served by Kambani Banda, who is assisted by Jerrison Shachoongo and Derrick Pringle.

Mr. Levy mentioned that there are no elders or deacons in Zimbabwe now, but three capable men help look after the 43 members in this very troubled country.

In Southern Africa there are a total of nine elders (six full-time) and 19 leading men (nine in South Africa and 10 in rest of Southern Africa). Leaders are being trained through a monthly standardized leadership training program.

After the international presentations, Ken Giese gave tribute to the deceased elders and wives. Honored this year were Charles "Chuck" Eugene Bailey, John Bald,

Carl Dailey, Joanne Dickinson, Danny Lee Good, William Robert (Bob) Hedge and Joy VanSchuyver.

President's Address

In President Clyde Kilough's address, he said he would tell us about what keeps him awake at night.

He said he is thankful that the income has still increased slightly in these tough economic times, when some churches face 25 percent decreases. He is thankful for the great blessing of having a church with faithful, committed members.

He said we face many challenges, however, but that they can be met.

Mr. Kilough organized his presentation around the three Positioning Statements in the Strategic Plan. The first one deals with preaching the gospel. Mr. Kilough pointed out that in 1995, our main media option for preaching the gospel was through print. Now we have print, television and Internet. He asked: If we were starting over in 2009, how would we apportion these? If we add up all the parts of the media budget dedicated to print, it would be 68 percent! How can we realign our priorities in order to use lower-cost media such as the Internet? We have to remodel our media house, but to remodel the house while we are still living in it is challenging. We can't start from scratch, but we can't have it all, he said. We don't want to scrap print, but we do have to realign our spending and priorities. We need a coordinated plan to use our money and manpower wisely. The Internet and television both have a potential for reaching greater numbers of people, but they must not compete. They must be coordinated.

In addressing the Positioning Statement on providing leadership for the Church, Mr. Kilough had the elders in the room who were over 55 stand up. This was by far the largest group, and they will all be over 70 in 15 years. Mr. Kilough presented several scenarios contrasting the numbers of potential retirees with the numbers of potential hires over the next 15 years, showing the great need for training more pastors just to maintain our current care for the churches.

On finances, the needs in both media and the ministry offer a challenge. This is not just about this year's budget, but we have to be thinking ahead for the years to come. Mr. Kilough pointed out that we face increasing legacy costs for retirement and health care. Our retiring pastors have given a wonderful legacy in the lives of the members of the Church. We do not consider it burdensome. But as these costs grow, the reality is that it will impact our budgets and we will have to plan ahead very carefully.

The third Positioning Statement is on unity. Mr. Kilough said that shows the manner in which we should make decisions. Tough decisions generally require sacrifice. Making disciples requires two legs on the same body—preaching the gospel and preparing a people—which must not compete but work together. There is still a great work to do, and we must do everything in a unified manner. Our governance structure

makes the wheels of innovation and change move slowly, but we cannot delay making some of the difficult decisions on how we implement our education and training programs, and how we prioritize our gospel media efforts.

These are the things that keep him awake at night, Mr. Kilough said. But on the other hand, we know who the head of the Church is, and in that confidence we can rest easy.

Treasurer's Address

Treasurer Jason Lovelady talked about “aligning people, technology and strategy.” He reported on the four primary categories of expenses: programs (mission specific), facilities, management and general, and legacy (insurance and benefits). Programs were by far the largest budgetary items.

Mr. Lovelady showed that the media share of the budget has grown from 19 percent (\$3.668 million) in 2003-04 to 25 percent (\$6.134 million). The congregational care budget has increased in dollar amount but decreased as a share of the budget pie from 42 percent in 2003-04 to 39 percent.

In the management and general area, dollar amounts have gone up, but percent of budget has declined from 7.0 percent to 5.9 percent.

Legacy costs include discretionary assistance to retired pastors. The Council decided about 10 years ago that estate donations (unless otherwise designated) be used for retirement purposes (discretionary assistance). As such, these funds are not included as part of the operational budget. One of the primary reasons is that they fluctuate dramatically from year to year. Last year we had over \$300,000, while this year only \$10,000. In addition the Council determined that the Church's discretionary assistance be maintained at its current level of \$523,000 per year and that any amounts needed above that figure would come from the retirement fund. Due to the demographics of our employees, we expect discretionary assistance to increase rapidly over the next five to 15 years. Mr. Lovelady said the future increase in legacy costs must be planned for now.

He said that the United States in many ways faces the greatest economic crisis since the Depression, which will lead to at the very least a weakening of the dollar and high inflation in the future.

Mr. Lovelady pointed out that U.S. attendance figures over the last six years have increased 1.9 percent, while income over the same time period increased 33.3 percent. Can we expect income to continue to increase with little or no increase in attendance? He said that despite both external and internal trends, he is confident that God will bless us with the resources we need to do the work. He also said he is confident of the members' faithfulness, if we, in turn, do our part and are good stewards with the resources that God provides. We can only be good stewards if we are united and work together.

Ministerial Services

Jim Franks, Ministerial Services operation manager, thanked all the elders for their service and gave a snapshot of Ministerial Services as UCG enters its 15th year.

Average U.S. attendance has increased from 11,346 in 2006 to 11,522 in 2009. This is about a half percent increase per year, or less than one person per congregation.

The demographics of the Church (from U.S. Festival registration in 2008):

- Under age 30, 35 percent (4,699).
- Over 60, 28 percent (3,663).
- Ages 30 to 60, 37 percent (4,878).

New people who contacted U.S. pastors, by quarter:

- 398 in the third quarter of last year.
- 354 in the fourth quarter.
- 515 in the first quarter this year (Mr. Franks mentioned this was a very encouraging increase).

Baptisms from 2003 to 2008 have been fairly consistent, with a range from 163 to 196.

Currently Ministerial Services employs 87 pastors, three associate pastors and three assistant pastors, for a total of 93. From 2001 to now, 20 men have been hired.

Altogether, there are 253 elders, and 247 of these have their ages on file.

- Over 80, 11 percent.
- 70-79, 30 percent.
- 60-69, 32 percent.
- 50-59, 20 percent.
- 40-49, 7 percent.

Mr. Franks also mentioned that 83 percent of the Ministerial Services budget goes directly to the pastors and local congregations.

Media and Communications Services

Larry Salyer, Media and Communications Services operation manager, started by asking: What do we want most? We all want the return of Jesus Christ. We love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8), and we know the gospel must be preached before Christ's return (Matthew 24:14). So we must love the gospel being preached before Christ returns.

Mr. Salyer pointed out that the budget for media has nearly doubled from 2003-04 to now. He said about \$36 million has been spent on media over those years, but we haven't made the impact we want yet. It's not just about the money, he said.

The Internet gives us far and away the greatest potential for reaching the world. Mr. Salyer reported that we have made strides in this area and will have more than the 4 million first-time visitors we projected. However, we won't reach the 42 percent visitor loyalty rate we aggressively projected.

We are having good responses to Internet ads, and our cost per response has dropped from \$3.31 in March 2008 to \$3.04 in March 2009.

Mr. Salyer also highlighted the trends toward social media as part of word-of-mouth promotion. He stressed that "people don't care what you know until they know that you care." Social media is more than just a buzzword. It's about listening to what people are saying.

Mr. Salyer showed a clip of a *GN* Commentary Ralph Levy did using British singing sensation Susan Boyle to make a point about superficiality. This demonstrates how our message can be shared by others. There were 1,232 views on YouTube, but there were another 3,369 video views and 23 reviews on the Susan Boyle Fan Web site!

Print makes up 68 percent of the media budget. To fulfill the Strategic Plan and stay within budget, Mr. Salyer asked, can we migrate more readers to the Web? He said we can't continue to measure success only by the number of English *Good News* subscriptions. There are other measures we need to consider as we move more to the Web. In the coming months we will have to make some hard decisions. In his judgment, the Internet should be the key element.

Mr. Salyer concluded by reminding everyone that we have been given the best message in the world and we are excited about proclaiming it.

Address From the Chairman

Mr. Dick mentioned that he has given the chairman's address eight times in the last 14 years and has noticed that certain major themes tend to reoccur. Among them are the following:

We recognized at our beginning that if we don't have doctrine right, we have nothing. But if we have nothing but doctrine right, we still have nothing. This is still true.

Further we recognized early in our existence that in order to *do* a work, we had to *be* a work.

At the first meeting of the General Conference of Elders we recognized that, "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1).

Mr. Dick also mentioned that we realized that *United* is in reality a journey, and we are still traveling toward that destination.

“Guns or Butter,” or the hard choices between our priorities, became an issue early on and was emphasized again in 1998 and is still a major issue today.

Last of all Mr. Dick repeated that we need to be a “fruits-based” work and thanked the Council from 2005 on for developing the strategic planning process. We all want to please God and hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Presentation to Mr. and Mrs. Dick

Roy Holladay took the floor to give honor to Mr. Dick. He mentioned that Mr. Dick was very instrumental in the founding of United in 1995. He was the chairman of the first Council selected in 1996. He and his wife, Dyanne, have devoted a tremendous amount of time and work. He is going to leave a big hole in the Council, Mr. Holladay said.

Vic Kubik, who is the only other Council member to have served continuously since the beginning of United, mentioned that they have gone through at least 75 Council meetings together. He praised Mr. Dick for his statesmanship and tact in very difficult situations. Mr. Dick knew how to use the rudder on the boat and was driven by what is best for the Church, irrespective of what people felt.

Gifts and flowers were presented to Mr. and Mrs. Dick for their years of service.

Monday Seminars

May 4 elders and wives were able to attend a number of workshops based on the theme of making disciples. The sessions covered: “Making Disciples While Preaching the Gospel,” “Getting Personal—as Disciples of Christ” women’s workshop, “Delivering Relevant Messages,” “Retirement Planning for Full-Time Ministers and Wives,” “The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment,” “Elements for a Happy and Contented Congregation” and “Growing Kids God’s Way.”

Mike Bennett

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