

**United Church of God, *an International Association***  
**Council of Elders Meeting Report**  
**July 16 and 21, 2009—Teleconferences**

**July 16, 2009, Teleconference**

In an executive session teleconference on Thursday, July 16, the Council of Elders appointed Gerald Seelig as the new Council reporter. As part of a comprehensive communication strategy, the Council desired to make this change at this time. It is the Council's intent to look closely at the process and method by which Council reports are generated and presented to the General Conference of Elders. The Council is evaluating a number of recommendations to improve how it communicates its work and duties to the ministry and members.

The Council appreciates the work of John Foster as outgoing reporter. Long hours of effort are required to produce these reports. In choosing Mr. Seelig, several Council members noted that his years of experience as secretary would facilitate a rapid transition to this role. In these challenging economic times, the Council is striving to be financially prudent. Having our new Council reporter based at the home office will allow a cost savings since no extra travel and lodging would be incurred for the reporter. The Council plans to recognize Mr. Foster's service at its quarterly meeting in August.

Roy Holladay  
*Chairman of the Council*

**July 21, 2009, Teleconference**

Chairman Holladay, with all the members of the Council on the teleconference, called the meeting to order at 5:09 p.m. Eastern Daylight Savings Time with prayer by Richard Thompson.

**Amend the Procedure for Placing Items on the Council Agenda**

The first order of business was with regard to amending the procedure for placing items on the Council agenda, which was adopted in February of this year. However, this procedure proved to be difficult to use at the Council's May meetings. Bill Eddington, chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee, explained the various proposed edits to the procedure. Further recommendations were made.

Then Bill Eddington moved, Darris McNeely seconded and the Council of Elders unanimously rescinded the procedure for placing items on the Council agenda, previously adopted on Feb. 26, 2009.

Bill Eddington then moved, Robin Webber seconded and the Council of Elders unanimously adopted the amended procedures for placing items on the Council agenda. Roy Holladay pointed out that Monday, July 27, 2009, is the cutoff date for submitting agenda items to him for the upcoming August meetings.

## Private Discussion Groups

The chairman mentioned that he contacted President Clyde Kilough to see if there was any other evidence submitted to him, his administration, regional pastors or anyone else of which the Council was not aware. Roy Holladay said that Clyde Kilough responded that he did not have any such evidence.

The chairman had submitted a 30-page document (prepared by Scott Ashley, Darris McNeely and Robin Webber) to the Council that summarizes the various submissions from the General Conference of Elders into 13 overall questions and addresses those questions. The chairman asked Darris McNeely to summarize the main points of the document for the Council. Darris McNeely pointed out that some of the questions made erroneous and inflammatory statements that the Council has chosen not to address. He stated that some of the questions put to the Council could not be answered because of privacy and other legal issues. He said that the Church's legal counsel was contacted and the legal opinion issued with regard to some of these issues back in April 2007 was consulted.

The 13 main questions addressed in this document with a brief summary answer are as follows:

1. **Why has the existence of private discussion groups been denied? Why hasn't the Council addressed this in a timely manner?** To the Council's knowledge, the existence of private discussion groups has never been denied by people who knew about them and the Aug. 14, 2008, Council report shows the issue was discussed in open session, except for when there was a real need to move into executive session.
2. **Which biblical, legal or organizational law or principle grants the Council of Elders or anyone else jurisdiction over the content or methodology of private communications (i.e., private mail or e-mail, face-to-face conversations, Facebook, meals together, etc.)?** Legal counsel was sought and, unless there was a criminal act involved, the Council has no jurisdiction or responsibility to intrude on private communications and, organizationally, UCG's e-mail policy forbids any inspection of corporate e-mail without the permission of the Council. However, elders are expected to uphold high ethical standards in their private communication or discussion groups.
3. **Is there any proof of bloc voting or wrongdoing on the alternate forum?** No evidence of bloc voting or wrongdoing has been presented to the Council since the secretary examined the 2008 ballots and issued his statement that no evidence of bloc voting had been found.
4. **What was the purpose of this other discussion group? Why was it established? Elders already have an Elder's Forum to discuss issues, so why was there a need to establish another?** A history of lack of open communication in our former affiliation led to the creation of various unofficial groups in the time

- leading up the formation of UCGIA. Some of those groups consisted of elders and lay members. By way of researching private discussion groups, some Council members became aware of certain UCG elders who placed messages on the Elder's Forum who were the recipients of intimidating and threatening behavior by other ministers who did not agree with the post. The common denominator to the existence of these private discussion groups appears to be that the participants did not believe they could openly communicate without fear of retribution.
5. **Why would people want to communicate within a private discussion group? What could be done there that could not be done on the Elder's Forum?** The Council has received documentation that the private group in question had its own set of rules that were very similar to that of the Elder's Forum, but not as limited. Branding such groups as evil or "underground" without clear supporting evidence constitutes judging and imputing motives that is contrary to Scripture. These personal communications were used to "wordsmith" a proposed amendment, agree on and submit a resolution for the GCE to consider (there have been at least three such resolutions) and seek advice on the appropriateness and/or accuracy of a proposed Elder's Forum post. The GCE has certain rights and responsibilities, but UCG's governing documents do not spell out a way for those rights to be exercised, i.e., 25 percent of the GCE can submit an agenda item to be balloted upon. And when this right has been exercised, each time the participants felt it necessary to go through private communication channels.
  6. **Which of our founding documents or legal restrictions prohibit me from voicing my opinion to another fellow elder?** As long as proper Christian conduct and ministerial ethics are maintained, there are no restrictions on communication between elders. A legal opinion was obtained by the Council, which stated that bloc voting for candidates was unethical and not allowed per our governing documents, but discussions with other elders with regard to issues to be balloted upon is allowed and even encouraged by those same governing documents.
  7. **Why did participants agree to keep its discussions confidential?** It is interesting to note that our own Elder's Forum rules require confidentiality. Council members have heard from some participants who said that they agreed to group confidentiality rules due to a perception of a lack of openness and acceptance of other ideas, as well as open hostility from others in the ministry. Unfortunately, some of the Elder's Forum messages, as well as a number of the questions submitted with regard to this discussion, were very much of an attacking and accusatory nature.
  8. **Did postings in this discussion group violate the rules of the Elder's Forum?** More latitude was allowed, which included the discussion of doctrine, elders' wives being able to read and contribute. The Council has heard second- and third-hand that messages were negative in spirit and intent. However, the same can be said of some of the Elder's Forum posts.

9. **At what point before the 2008 GCE vote did the other discussion group close down? Did it encourage bloc voting at the 2008 GCE?** The Council has documentation verifying the discussion group in question was dissolved on April 10, 2008, before the Call and Notice packets were mailed, making it impossible to use the discussion group to bloc vote.
10. **Who (if anybody) controlled the forum? Who organized and developed it?** As the Elder's Forum is not "controlled," neither were submissions on the discussion group in question prescreened for approval or denial. Paul Kieffer acknowledged that he set up a forum-like discussion group for friends in the ministry and their wives to discuss issues of mutual interest.
11. **Did the Council read all, or some, or any, of the posts from this discussion group?** Only those posts submitted to the Council were read. The Council, because of legal privacy issues, feels it should not, and does not have the jurisdiction to, read private posts.
12. **What value should the ministry put first, our "freedom of speech" or higher values which promote unity and edification? If the latter, why do some on the Council seem to be justifying the existence of other means and forms of communication by arguing the former?** The ministry should value both and one should not be pitted against the other. Unity and edification are good and necessary. At the same time, freedom of choice, thought, speech and action are God-given gifts that allow each individual to grow as a Christian and child of God. As such, a Christian has the right to speak to whomever he or she chooses and on whatever topic at the time, in the manner and at the place he or she determines, but in a way that is worthy of our high calling—words seasoned with grace. Therefore, we must be careful not to attempt to legislate or control other people's speech and actions, which could violate the rights and privileges given to each individual by God Himself.
13. **Do private discussion groups violate biblical ethics?** The Council shares the concern that nothing unethical be communicated by private channels that could hinder the work of UCG. Bloc voting has been the central concern expressed. The Council has spent a great deal of time and effort considering the hearsay allegations with regard to private discussion groups and has determined that it is just hearsay. And the Council has noted that it cannot designate or control that which it has no formal jurisdiction over. When the Council stays on the firm ground of that which is its organizational domain, it is on solid ground. Anything else leads to a slippery slope towards control of people's lives that the Council thought was left behind with our former affiliation.

Roy Holladay asked if there were any concerns about the document. Clyde Kilough said that the document needed to be edited, but that it would take way too much of the Council's time if the entire Council were to try to edit it. Roy Holladay recommended that the document be posted on the ministerial Web site for all elders to

view. He also recommended that he and Clyde Kilough write a short summary of the document and that both sign it.

Dick Thompson said that he does not believe that this document will end the questions. He asked if elders would be allowed to pose further questions if this entire document is posted online. Roy Holladay said that there does not seem to be any more information that the Council can put forth with regard to the bloc voting issue. Robin Webber then said that he realizes there are going to be some people who are simply not going to accept what is in this document, but we have to move forward.

Clyde Kilough said that there must be edits, because he cannot sign off on some portions of the document as currently written. He mentioned that it is very important that the document be edited very carefully. He cautioned that summarizing several questions into one question must be done very carefully. He stated that there were between 50 and 60 questions submitted and that those questions not answered could be construed as not being legitimate or being inflammatory and accusatory. Darris McNeely mentioned that he believes there is precedence for some of the questions being ignored. He said that, in previous GCE meetings, there have been several questions submitted at the question-and-answer session that the Council would not address or answer because they were considered inflammatory or accusatory.

Robin Webber asked how much credence the Council was going to put into hearsay and people's feelings on which no evidence has been presented or is forthcoming. Otherwise, he said that this issue will just go on and on. Bob Berendt mentioned that there will always be those who will disagree. He said that those asking questions could have good intentions, but even some of those questions can be in the wrong.

Scott Ashley said that he, Robin Webber and Darris McNeely, in writing this document, attempted in good faith to address the core issues being asked. He cautioned that there were some issues that, they found upon contacting legal counsel, simply could not be answered.

Aaron Dean stated that, in some cases, he would like to see who put forward the questions because some of them were quite rude. He asked if there should be a totally independent group to look into this. He said that there are going to be those who simply will not accept the outcome of the election and will continue to put out innuendo and rumor about other people. Scott Ashley then stated that it was found that allegations of bloc voting were simply not there and those who were charged were exonerated.

Richard Thompson mentioned that he supports an independent group of elders looking into this. He said that such an independent study would bring forth evidence not yet brought forward. He stated that the lack of trust that has been brought among the eldership is very serious and this whole issue has caused a great deal of distrust among many elders. Darris McNeely asked Richard Thompson if he, as a member of the Ministerial Services Team, knows of any other information that has not been presented to

the Council. Darris McNeely said that some of the accusations and statements are second- and third-hand from up to 10 years ago. He stated that legal counsel cautioned against prying into private conversations and e-mails.

Clyde Kilough stated that he thinks that elders are as much concerned about derogatory comments that have been made on these other discussion groups. Roy Holladay said that he would venture that everyone has said something negative about someone else at some time or another. He reminded the Council of the proverb in Ecclesiastes 7:21 that says, "Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee" (King James Version). He said that the Council simply has no jurisdiction to look into some of the questions raised.

Melvin Rhodes said that alternate forums were started because elders feared the administration. He said that some elders have put messages on the Elder's Forum and have received private messages from some in the administration that could be taken as nothing but intimidation.

Scott Ashley said that the three (Scott Ashley, Darris McNeely and Robin Webber) of them who worked on this document were given hard evidence of several such intimidating messages. Bill Eddington recommended that if any Council member believes a question has not been adequately addressed, then he should bring it up for further discussion. He said that if this is allowed to continue, a Pandora's Box might be opened, because he is also aware, anecdotally, of such intimidating messages being sent out from certain ones in the administration.

Paul Kieffer said that he believes the Council needs to be made aware of the names of those individuals that some in the administration claim have negative information with regard to such private discussion groups.

Victor Kubik mentioned that he has been dealing with this issue for so long that it now seems to have taken on a life of its own. He said that he is very sorry that this has not been resolved and endless hours and resources have been expended on this matter. Have we grown so fat and sassy that we have lost sight of what our priorities are? Melvin Rhodes said that it just may be that nothing the Council can bring forth will satisfy everyone.

Melvin Rhodes then mentioned that only one in eight members of the GCE submitted any questions with regard to this issue. Robin Webber said that a number of the 50 to 60 questions were not adversarial towards private communications but were asking why we were involving ourselves at all in this matter.

Roy Holladay mentioned that his great fear is that this has gone on for such a long time and there are some very major issues coming before the Council in August. He cautioned that something like this can just eat into the time the Council has to really move forward. He commented that some of the other questions posed were actually addressed in the initial part of the document before addressing the 13 summarized

questions. He said that he does not see any valid reason to have an independent group research this issue further.

Chairman Holladay requested that any Council member who had edits, questions or input should submit them to the entire Council by the end of this week. He asked the three writers of this document to then review those suggestions or input and edit the document so that it can be posted. He called for a teleconference on Tuesday, July 28, 2009, at 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Savings Time to have a motion to adopt the edited document. He said that, if there is something important discovered, it should be brought to the attention of the Council immediately.

The meeting was adjourned just after 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Savings Time.

*-end-*

Gerald Seelig  
*Council Reporter*

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