

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Meeting Report
Dec. 6, 2010—Cincinnati, Ohio

Chairman Melvin Rhodes opened the Dec. 6, 2010, Council meeting at 9 a.m. by asking Robin Webber to open in prayer. The meeting was held at the Holiday Inn Eastgate, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The chairman announced that Jim Franks resigned from the Council over the weekend. He added that the secretary informed him that the next Council nominee on the GCE ballot in May was Roy Holladay, who had accepted the assignment.

All 12 Council members were present: Scott Ashley, Dave Baker, Robert Berendt, Mike Blackwell, Aaron Dean, Bill Eddington, Roy Holladay, Darris McNeely, Melvin Rhodes, Mario Seiglie, David Treybig and Robin Webber. Also present were Dennis Luker, Victor Kubik, Gerald Seelig, Larry Darden, David Evans, Peter Eddington and other guests, including some of the Council members' wives.

The minutes of the previous meeting were ratified and the agenda was agreed upon.

President's Report by Dennis Luker

Here is a first-person summary of President Luker's presentation: On June 24 the Council of Elders appointed me as president of the United Church of God. LeeAnn and I moved to Cincinnati, willingly, to serve God and His people. We made a promise to God that we would serve God and His people faithfully for the rest our lives. That's what we intend to do. Since baptism, we have served faithfully for 51 years.

What I have to say is not about my wife and me, nor is it about me as president, but it is about God's will for our lives and His will for His Church. We all know that the United Church of God is at a crisis point right now. We have serious disagreements in the ministry for a number of issues, and most of the membership is aware of this and deeply concerned about the future of United, as we all are.

In my message I do want to let you all know clearly where and why I stand as president of the United Church of God. I speak to all my brothers and sisters in Christ, to all my fellow elders in Christ and to all who may be listening and hearing. I speak to all in hope that we all may be reconciled in God's time. So here is where I stand in *seven major issues* as president and why I stand as I do:

1. I stand in godly fear before my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom I must give account for every word and every deed.

I am not worried about what others think of me, what some have said—even though they hurt and are almost unbelievable—but I am deeply concerned about what Christ thinks and says about me. So I want you to know where I stand—not in fear of the Internet and everything going on. All of that

will fade away and will become nothing some day, and it will be meaningless. That will come and go, it will pass.

Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10: We must all appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. I acknowledge before God my faults and mistakes. I fear God. I shall give account to Him some day.

2. I stand under the authority that Christ has placed in His Church.

He is the living Head of the Church, and I believe, with my whole heart, that He had a hand in forming the United Church of God. Our form of governance certainly has its flaws and needs improvement, but I look to Jesus Christ and depend upon Him, and His guiding hand, to solve our problems.

There are many lessons to be learned over the years in the Church of God. We are all tested in this area of recognizing: Where is that governing authority of Jesus Christ? Where is He working? Who is He using?

I want you all to know where I stand as president of the United Church of God. I stand, and I want to make sure that I stand, under the authority that Christ has placed under His Church.

I personally do not believe that any improvement to our documents (although they need to be improved, and I am sure they will be)—that there is any form of human governance we could come up with—that would solve the problem of human nature, human ego, human vanity, human differences, human personalities, human temperaments, human points of view and all the many differences that we have as people.

I have always stood under the authority within the Church of God. I learned that a long time ago under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong.

3. I stand with the present Council of Elders (as they submit to Jesus Christ) as the legitimate, elected, governing board of United, with the authority given to it by Christ, working through the General Conference of Elders.

As a member of United and as an elder I have understood that I can give my perspective, my input, my point of view, my advice, my counsel, and then give my vote to issues. But I made an agreement, as we all did, that once we balloted on an issue and that decision was made—following our governing documents, whether that decision agreed with me, or I agreed with it—that I would accept that decision of the Council of Elders, the governing body of the Church of God, under the General Conference of Elders, and under Jesus Christ!

It is not required that every Council member, or every pastor, or every elder, agrees with every decision that is made by the Council of Elders. But publicly, we all agreed, that we will uphold the governing authority of the United Church of God and the process by which we make decisions and move forward in doing the work of God.

I want everyone to understand out there that I am fully aware of the issues that we are dealing with. I want all to understand where I stand in the support of the present Council of Elders. I am not a yes man—I will do whatever Jesus Christ puts in my heart and mind to do—when it comes right down to it, doing what is necessary to do, I will do what I feel Christ guides me, and inspires me, and leads me to do in fulfilling my responsibilities as president of the United Church of God.

The point I want to make here, is that every man that I have served with in the Council of Elders, I believe that is a man that has been sincere, a good man, trying to do his very best to serve God, and to serve the Church and to serve the people. I don't know of any man that I have served with that is evil, who has maliciously tried to harm God's Church or work or people. We all are men who just make mistakes at times, and sometimes we can become very strong in our feelings and emotions and feelings and issues.

I have always supported the Council of Elders, whoever was president, whoever was in whatever duty or responsibility. And I have always looked at each man, no matter who he was, serving in the Council or in what office or what position, as having been put there by Jesus Christ at that time, and I have put my faith in Jesus Christ. And so I still stand, as I always did, with the present Council of Elders, as the legitimate, elected, governing board of United.

I have always made up my mind to be loyal to those leaders that God has put in positions of governing authority, no matter what their faults, mistakes or sins may be, knowing that Jesus Christ, in His own time and in His own way, if they were not pleasing Him and not doing His will and not repenting and growing, that He will eventually remove them.

4. I stand for all the laws and commandments of God, especially His Sabbath and Holy Days, and would NEVER depart from obeying Him and loving Him with my whole heart.

I want to make that clear, in case anyone would think that Denny Luker is a "liberal" when it comes to doctrine or God's laws or commandments. I have wanted to understand the concept of mercy and the application of God's law and commandments with righteousness. To look upon my heart, my attitude and my mind, to look upon the fact that I love Him, and I love His laws and commandments as a way of living my life with all of my heart. And all that needs to be repented of, shall be, and eventually rectified. I am a heart person, but I do have a head too. I do try to use it, to think as clearly as I can with God's Spirit and God's help. I have a heart of love for God and God's people.

I want to make it plain and clear that I will never depart from keeping God's Sabbath and Holy Days and commandments and from teaching that way, and from trying to learn how to better obey God and keep His laws and commandments, not only in the letter, but more importantly as well, in the Spirit and intent of His law in my heart and in my mind.

5. I stand for helping to train and prepare a dedicated ministry to serve God's people, to prepare a people for God's service and for His Kingdom.

I understand the vital, critical importance of good training, of proper training, for the ministry, for the eldership. That is our heritage and part of our duty and calling and responsibility to make sure that we, as a Council and administration, are planning and developing our programs. So I stand for helping to prepare and train more elders and pastors to be dedicated servants to God's people and to

provide the servants for God's congregation and His people, wherever they may be in the United Church of God.

One of the purposes of the ministry, as it says in Ephesians 4:12, is to prepare a people for service, to help prepare God's people to be His servants, to be a part of His Church, and to be a part of His work. We are dedicated to do that in the Church and in the work of God. It will be done. There may be different approaches, different ways to do it, but we will carry on with the preparation and training of a dedicated ministry for the United Church of God and His people.

6. I stand for giving my life to help finish the work of God, to help proclaim the good news of God's coming Kingdom to this world.

So do you! LeeAnn and I had to reevaluate our lives a few years ago. I think you do know that we were considering retirement at age 70. We are of good health, of a sound mind. It is a blessing, as we age, that we are able to have our minds that are alert and filled with God's Spirit and motivated by a desire to be part of His Church and His work. I am not saying it's wrong to retire—it certainly is not, because even when we retire from the full-time ministry, our service as elders does not cease—it continues.

I want to reassure you all that I stand for giving my whole life to help finish the work of God. I will continue to use everything God has given me to use to pass it on in every way possible. I want to give my life, energy, strength and lessons, and everything to help finish work of God, to help proclaim the incredible truth that God has given us. We will get through it, as challenging or as difficult it is, we will get through it, because we have a purpose and a calling and a goal.

We all believe deeply, with our whole heart, that our calling is to do the work of God. For me it was both learning:

- About the true Sabbath day and what it pictures, that it reminds us of God the Creator and His coming Kingdom on earth, and the rest we can have on that day picturing Christ Himself;
- But also the Holy Days of God, that incredible, awesome plan of salvation. I will never forget, to this day, that after God opened my mind and I began to hear messages and read articles about the Holy Days of God, what an incredible relief I got from the understanding that this is not the only day of salvation!

I stand for giving the rest of my life, no matter how old, and how long time goes on, you will not find me quitting or giving up, I will get discouraged, I will get down (as I did recently, we all do), but you will not find Denny Luker quitting or giving up on you or anyone else. We made that decision a long time ago, and we remind ourselves that we gave our lives to God, to Jesus Christ and His service for the rest of our lives—however He wants to use us.

7. I stand for working toward reconciliation within the United Church of God and the Church of God at large, as Christ leads us and shows us the way.

I don't know the way to true reconciliation, but I know Someone who truly does, and can show it to us and lead us to it and help us to get there eventually. We will ALL be reconciled in God's time.

I have no ill will toward any brother of Christ, or for anyone, for that matter. I stand for working toward reconciliation; it is in my heart, even though I may have not done it perfectly, in the way God would have me do it. I know He will show us all, in time, the way to reconciliation. It can be a challenging and difficult process, no matter what happens, as we work our way through this trial. I don't want anyone to doubt the sincerity of my words. You can certainly doubt the imperfection of my words and following through and doing everything perfectly the way I would love to.

I want you all to know where I stand in support of God's Church and God's work and this Council, and will stand strongly and firmly. I hope that with the right heart and right attitude and the right spirit, we can work our way through the difficulties that we are presently encountering. Whatever I need to do or am called to do by this Council or Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit working in my heart and mind and my conscience, I will do to the best of my ability as God has called me to do, as president in the United Church of God.

In conclusion, I stand with love and faith and hope that Jesus Christ will see us through our present trials, and prepare us all for His Kingdom and help us all to finish the incredible great work that He has given us all to do.

Media and Communications Services Report by Peter Eddington

Peter Eddington complimented the great media team involved in various ways to help the Church's media efforts. He gave an update on some exciting opportunities ahead for us in preaching the gospel of God's Kingdom.

Plans are under way to print the *United News* in color from the January edition at no additional net cost by moving to a different type of paper that is less expensive.

We have undertaken a special advertising campaign on Google for the Spanish work. The *Buenas Noticias* (Spanish *Good News*) subscription list had dropped from the earlier 20,000 to approximately 9,000 to 10,000 because we could not gather all the subscriber addresses. In merely 14 days of advertising on the Web we have added over 10,000 subscribers! The cost per response (CPR) was at about half of the English-language advertising cost. Most of the responses came from Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Bolivia.

Due to the annual *Good News* renewal program, our *GN* print run has dropped to 350,000 from the previous 550,000. With the lower print run, we are able to increase our advertising a little more now. We have started in Australia and Eastern Europe and will in due course add other areas.

The top booklet request is *The Ten Commandments* booklet; in the last 12 months we had 14,621 requests. The next booklets are *Understanding Bible Prophecy* (8,544) and *The Church Jesus Built* (5,700).

A strong endorsement we are getting is that some churches are writing to us for multiple copies, as they want to hand out our booklets in their Bible studies as a study aid to teach their congregations. For instance, a church leader who is going to give presentations to four different Presbyterian churches requested 200 copies of the *Holidays or Holy Days* booklet. He is going to expose the fallacies about Christmas!

The *Beyond Today* TV program response is growing very encouragingly. There are no TV Nielsen ratings for Sunday morning religious broadcasting, but our estimates (best guess based on past programming) are 1 to 1.2 million people in our audience.

Mr. Blackwell asked the demographics. Mr. Eddington said it is mostly the Sunday morning church goers, a majority being baby boomers. Mr. Berendt asked for a break down between the United States and Canada. Mr. Eddington highlighted in the report handed out to the Council members the response differences between cable, WGN and Canadian TV.

Mr. Holladay asked about the financing of the WGN program. Mr. Eddington explained that the 2010/2011 budget, approved by the GCE in May this year, included almost \$500,000 for broadcast air time. It was already in the budget. The cost of WGN is a little higher than that, but we have additional funds in our Internet advertising that will make up the difference for our WGN costs. But these were all in the budget to begin with, and agreed upon at May's GCE.

Mr. Bill Eddington asked about the possibility of WGN offering us "dual feed" for the West Coast, so that the broadcast there would also be at 8:30 a.m. (and not at 5:30 a.m.). The answer was that WGN decided not to go with a "dual feed."

We are exploring a couple of additional opportunities on the West Coast—a super station off San Francisco, a sports station that allows taped programs on Sunday morning—that look quite reasonable, but not for this fiscal year unless we get a windfall.

Our cost per response goal is \$10. The last *Reader's Digest* ad that we ran was \$12. Our CPR at \$10.48 for the rapture program is a good indication that we are moving toward our goal. Internet CPR is \$2 to \$3, but these subscribers are the least likely to renew. Those responding from TV or *Reader's Digest* are more likely to renew. Mr. Baker asked if they could download a booklet via the Web. Peter Eddington said that 10 to 15 percent chose to get a digital download (PDF file).

Mr. Bill Eddington asked about the panel style of presentation on *Beyond Today*. Mr. Eddington said he was happy with the panel discussion at the end. We have been experimenting with off-studio broadcasting to create variety in the format. Gary Petty did some interviews in Texas talking to some people who lived in the Middle East. It will be a program about the Arab-Israel conflict.

In January we will be recording in Budapest, Hungary, and in Vienna, Austria, on the subjects of Europe in prophecy and Islam in prophecy. Darris McNeely was able to get a "no-cost" to the Church trip, so we will be recording these two programs overseas.

Our young video editors (Rudy Rangel, Clint Porter and Jamie Schreiber) are doing a great job in TV graphics to add to the abilities of Clay Thornton for the *BT* programs.

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Jorge de Campos
Stand-in Council Reporter