



United Church of God *an International Association*

Robin Webber
Chairman

Victor Kubik
President

March 4, 2015

Dear fellow elders and members,

The Council of Elders of the United Church of God met in Milford, Ohio, Feb. 22 to 26. Most came in early on Friday to spend the Sabbath and prepare for preliminary meetings on Sunday. I was scheduled to speak on the Sabbath, but we were snowed in along with much of the rest of the Midwest. I must say for a Southern Californian to watch falling snow was a lovely experience, especially from the cozy interior of a friend's home with a crackling fireplace to warm the soul.

The good news is that the weather cooperated for the remainder of the schedule, and we were able to accomplish everything slated on the agenda and deal with additional matters. Please be assured that when we do meet in these quarterly sessions, we realize the expense to the Church and therefore strive to efficiently accomplish the tasks set before us in guiding the Church's efforts towards fulfilling the vision and mission of the Church.

Once again, let me share these two statements with you to allow you to focus on what you support in prayer, fasting, financial support and volunteer service in so many ways. The Word of God, Holy Scripture, and these statements are the *spiritual GPS* that keeps the Council on course and guides us to positive outcomes that glorify our Heavenly Father and emulate the example of His Son.

Vision Statement: A Church led by God's Holy Spirit, joined and knit together by what every member supplies, with all doing their share and growing in love to fulfill God's great purpose for humanity to bring many children to glory (Ephesians 4:16, Hebrews 2:10).

Mission Statement: The mission of the Church of God is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples in all nations and care for those disciples.

Allow me to share personal observations and highlights from the recent meetings: The United Church of God strives to maintain its initial commitment nearly 20 years ago to our worldwide membership that we would: 1) Preach the gospel with every means available, 2) Establish pastoral oversight for congregations, 3) Set up annual festival sites, and 4) Maintain active youth development programs to "touch the future." We continue to fulfill this four-prong commitment as best as possible with the manpower, funds and other resources available.

With this in mind: The administration reported that 2014 saw the highest number of visitors ever to our Church website at UCG.org (6.89 million unique visitors, measured quarterly). The goal with God's blessing is for UCG.org to become the leading online Christian content source. *The Good News* magazine (soon to be called *Beyond Today*) and the *Beyond Today* television program continue to offer a biblical balance of doctrinal insight, practical Christian living guidance, and prophetic insight for an increasingly frenetic world largely devoid of biblical understanding. Yes, it is God who calls (John 6:44), but He expects us to do our part as "fishermen of men" as we *direct their attention to Him* and what He desires to perform in their lives.

Ministerial and Member Services continues to actively and systematically develop new leaders to serve local congregations and in some cases to replace faithful retiring pastors. We have developed online ministerial education programs and local mentoring programs to assure continued transmission of His loving truths and care to His spiritual flock. We continue to be blessed with such individuals. During these meetings, we approved four ministerial ordinations and the re-credentialing of another elder. These gentlemen will join the ranks of 361 elders currently serving a mosaic of humanity around the world.

We reviewed the Educational Task Force Report regarding the Ambassador Bible College (ABC) curriculum, presented by a task force of 17 professional educators within our midst. Their report was based on careful review of a major survey sent to all ABC alumni, instructors and our pastors. The goals presented to the Council were unanimously approved. ABC will continue to: 1) Present the ageless precious truths of God to future generations and 2) Create an environment that accents the attribute of service to all. Additionally, the personal relationships derived in this program will develop personal bonds for decades to come that will strengthen the Church. Ultimately, while ABC is not designed to be a ministerial school, individuals will emerge to this calling—as some already have.

The February meetings focus on preparation for the upcoming meeting of the General Conference of Elders (GCE) in May. We responded to the recommendations of the GCE Planning Committee and approved the various meetings, topics and speakers for this annual business meeting and educational forum for the conference members. This year's will be special—marking the official 20-year mark since the inception of the United Church of God. The theme will be "*Labor in the Word.*" How fitting, as our genesis for coming together 20 years ago was to respond to this divine revelation and uphold it by obeying His Word rather than follow the traditions of men. As chairman of the General Conference of Elders, I will in short order be sending out an official invitation to all elders and wives to attend.

After much deliberation on all that was presented to us, the Council unanimously endorsed the proposed Strategic Plan, Operation Plan and Budget to be presented to the General Conference of Elders in May for their consideration. This comes only after extensive meetings between the Council, its Strategic Planning and Finance Committee, and the administration—which all began last August. We were able to propose a bold and vigorous path forward for our Church for this coming fiscal year due to God's blessings and your continued support. Our income is up 10 percent for the fiscal year, and our reserves are fully in place. We plan to operate by a balanced budget of actual donated income while at the same time setting aside for challenging times ahead.

On behalf of the Council, I would like to simply state our sincere appreciation for your continuing support of God's work through this instrument within the Body of Christ over these past 20 years. Not a one of you is taken for granted. We are all in this together by God's grace and design. Over these 20 years we have collectively experienced mountain-top moments, plateaus of peaceful good times, and valleys in which the only way forward was to drop to our knees and look up. You have all been a part of this and given your all—first and foremost to God above. This ultimately is a spiritual work and not a work about men. Like the patriarch Abraham we continue a spiritual journey by a compass known but to our supreme Heavenly Father (Jude 24-25) and the living and active Head of the Church and the Lord of our lives—Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:11).

Now we move forward in faith (Hebrews 11:6) towards the New Testament Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread that express the essence of God's plan of salvation for humanity. They bring us to remembrance of the perfect life of the Son of Man, the sacrificial death of the Son of God, and the triumphant power of God manifested over the grave by a glorious resurrection on our behalf that now allows us to live a new life before our Heavenly Father in Christ (Romans 6:3-11). As we approach these God-ordained festivals, let our hearts echo and lives display the joy expressed in 1 Peter 1:3-5: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

May the God of such hope keep and bless you,



Robin Webber