



United Church of God an International Association

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Dear fellow elders and members,

The Council of Elders (CoE) of the United Church of God (UCG) meets in Cincinnati from Dec. 6 through 10. The Sunday is set apart for a retreat along with our president, Victor Kubik. We will meet that day at a nearby location to grant fresh perspective away from the home office. It's often beneficial to view matters from a different vantage point. Formal meetings begin on Monday and end on Thursday.

This retreat allows the leadership of the Church to candidly assess the spiritual direction of UCG. As we seek to be "about our Father's business," such a setting allows meaningful time to contemplate the words of Jesus when He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). It presents opportunity to assess individually and collectively that we are internally embracing our Heavenly Father's desire as worded in our vision statement to be "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)" (emphasis added throughout).

Also, it allows us to ensure that we're spiritually and doctrinally in alignment with our three-fold biblically based mission statement to: "1) Preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, 2) make disciples in all nations and, 3) care for those disciples." Such evaluation and assessment is essential if we're to live up to the God-given description that His Church is the "pillar and ground of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). As we consider and put all of this together, we come to understand that God's revelation of truth and understanding must be undergird with a growing love, not only for the truth, but also for one another. There must be a deepening and widening godly love for all who are made in His image but not yet called. Yes, we've been granted a marvelous revelation! But it's more than what's in our heads, it's also what lodges in our hearts, as we learn to "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

Fellow ministers and dear brethren: Allow me to share something with you. As we approach these coming meetings, the word that keeps echoing in my mind is peace. Why is that? I would pray that it's by God's prompting to share with you. All around this world, we see horrendous events occurring, whether the dateline is Paris, Brussels, Syria, Mali, the Sinai or the streets of our own cities. We read about godless decisions made by politicians and know the long-term results of people thumbing their nose at Scripture. Proverbial shoes are dropping so quickly that we can increasingly become tone deaf to the thump. All of this demonstrates what Isaiah penned so long ago: "The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways" (Isaiah 59:8).

As Christians we cannot spiritually afford to become tone-deaf, but we need to be aware of the times and fervently pray "Thy Kingdom come!" It's so needed! As the world around us darkens and strays from God's initial design, we've been invited to walk towards a future framed in hope. We read and believe that Jesus Christ is coming back to earth to set up the Kingdom of God. The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) is coming to save humanity from itself (Matthew 24:21-22)! Mankind does have a hope beyond self-obliteration, and each of us have hope beyond our personal grave!

This Living Head of the Church (*ecclesia*—that which is called out), Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, tells His followers, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). He is bringing peace to

this world, but it will not come easily, because human nature doesn't like to surrender itself to purposes beyond itself. This same Prince of Peace reminds us that peace is not only reserved for a future world but tells us our homework (our heart work!) is here and now by encouraging us to be like Him when He stated, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9).

It's with this scriptural backdrop that we come together next week to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). And yes, "iron will be sharpening iron," but it's how we put those fragments together that glorifies God, serves His people, and witnesses to everyone that "the light of the world," Jesus Christ, shines in us (John 8:12, 12:36).

The issues set before us are many and varied (please note the attached agenda). The CoE will be updated by the administration on its recent efforts and future initiatives that allow the CoE to maintain effective oversight of all operations. The Council itself will review its current three-year Strategic Plan and make course adjustments for ultimate General Conference approval. Again, this plan is based on promoting clearly stated principles and goals that permeate our evangelism to the world, discipling our own membership, and educating our young people. Your faithful tithes and generous donations make all of this possible, and by God's guidance we strive to stretch every penny. There will also be a report by our external auditor that will be shared with you as our faithful spiritual shareholders. The Council wants you to know what we are about and what we are about doing, *so please note the attachment (Vision-Mission-Guiding Principles)*.

In light of current events coming into friction with God's ageless design for humanity, the CoE will review a statement that further solidifies and explains the Church's teaching on the God-given institution of marriage between a man and a woman. More and more as Christians we will need to stand for something and remain standing!

The CoE and administration continuously evaluate how to provide dedicated and trained pastors and elders for our devoted brethren around the world. It's always been our commitment to provide a ministry to care for the membership. We look forward to hearing more from Mr. Kubik on plans to train and hire more ministerial trainees. Last year we hired six men, and we hope to strategically maintain a similar level of hiring in years to come. We're hiring qualified, life-experienced individuals along with wives with dedicated hearts to assist their husbands and share their love for God and the membership in their own way.

We will also review and evaluate the needs of our home office facility. It's now showing some age and requires maintenance, and we have to evaluate its ongoing sufficiency to fulfill the long-term interest of God's work through UCG. Remember that the site and facility were initially selected and designed to enable expansion. We certainly need meaningful deliberation on this subject. We will also begin preparing for the upcoming General Conference of Elders by reviewing surveys from last May's conference. We are always cognizant that we're here to serve on their behalf.

Please keep us in your prayers as you are in ours. Please pray that we will seek God's will and not merely our own. God's truth and His precious elect are too important to lean towards our own understanding. Let's remember in this restless world that the God of peace reminds us: "The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; *and the peace of God*, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

May God's grace uphold and bless you in every way.



Robin Webber