

United Church of God, *an International Association*

Council of Elders Quarterly Meeting Report

Milford, Ohio

Monday, December 8

The day was spent in planned Executive Session. The day's agenda was as follows:

- 8:30 a.m. Welcome to Council Members, approval of minutes of prior meetings and Council approval of the current agenda (Chairman).
- 8:45 a.m. Discussion of Council Norms and Best Practices (Facilitated by Michael Wilkinson).
- 5:30 p.m. Meeting concluded.

Tuesday, December 9

The day was spent in planned Executive Session. The day's agenda was as follows:

- 8:30 a.m. Strategic Planning Discussion, continuation of November meetings (Facilitated by Michael Wilkinson).
- 5:30 p.m. Meeting Ended.

Wednesday, December 10

Chairman Pebworth called the morning session to order at 8:03 a.m. Eastern. Paul Wasilkoff opened the meeting with prayer. Eleven Council members were present; Scott Ashley was feeling unwell in the morning, but arrived around 11:45 a.m.

Chairman Pebworth covered the agenda and updates to the agenda and stated that the minutes from the previous meetings had already been approved. Chairman Pebworth then turned the floor over to John Elliott for the President's report.

President's Report: John Elliott

Mr. Elliott greeted the Council. He went on to mention that the home office works as a family; they encourage and help each other out. Anyone can go to anyone else at the home office for assistance, and all are pleased to assist one another.

He emphasized that Jesus is leading this Church to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). The home office has a responsibility to serve the Church's needs here at the home office, in the United States, and throughout the world. He expressed that being at the home office has

given him a new perspective on how much is done by the home office staff. The staff is giving their all to the advancement of God's work and they look to God daily for direction and help.

Mr. Elliott said some of the recent staff positions at the home office have been filled. Ted Budge is the Treasurer, and Linda Api is managing Financial Services. He said they are upgrading some of their financial processes to expedite donation and expense processing and reporting. He also said that income has been holding at similar levels to previous years, and we are currently under budget for the year-to-date.

Mr. Elliott then mentioned that Mr. Steve Myers oversees staff across the United States as well as international senior pastorates. Mr. Elliott also said the scope of his department is huge, and yet he is currently the sole full-time Ministerial and Members Services (MMS) employee at the home office. Mr. Elliott said his goal is for Mr. Myers to receive ample administrative help for all needs across Ministerial services.

Mr. Elliott expressed a renewed focus on young families in the Church who may feel underserved. He mentioned that the Council approved some extra focus on that demographic, which will be reflected in the upcoming Strategic Plan.

He then said the home office has 14 departments with employees serving both onsite and remotely. In addition, there are volunteer workers who contribute in various areas. He shared that due to increasing complexities in performing God's work in the digital age, we are consistently in need of specifically skilled staffing in various areas. Mr. Elliott and others mentioned that we need to pray that God will continue to "send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Mr. Elliott said he recently visited Mr. Gerald Weston and his staff at the Living Church of God offices in North Carolina. He has also recently spoken with Mr. Jim Franks at the COGWA offices. He mentioned that most of what we all do is done in triplicate, such as with offices, hall rentals, travel, and Feast sites, etc. Mr. Elliott assured everyone that while there is no desire to combine, it seems most members wish we were together. He then compared what has happened in some cases to a divorce in a family. He said such splits are painful, messy and are typically private interactions among a few leaders without members being fully aware or participating. He also mentioned that currently, the "children" of God wish for the "parents" to get back together. He said that, "it does not seem realistic at this point, so we all need to move forward, repenting and striving with agape love and respect for one another and the work we are performing for Jesus Christ."

He explained that Jesus desires that God's children all be one (John 17:20-21), and he explained that while we are not all in a single corporation, at least we all need to be one in God and Jesus Christ by having an agape mindset. Let's all help each other in striving to do just that, please.

Mr. Elliott also said that Mr. Franks mentioned that they are building a new studio at their headquarters in Texas. He encourages all to ask God to bless their efforts and LCG's efforts in doing His work. He also mentioned that some UCG and LCG media staff will be attending the same national media conference and they are looking forward to spending some time together there.

Mr. Elliott mentioned that the Beyond Today senior presenters will travel to Israel for a special series of programs from the Holy Land. He said that “Being able to be at the location while presenting material related to their messages will make the program even more effective. Also, there will be the added benefit of being able to acquire additional footage that can be used for future video projects.”

Mr. Elliott gave an update on our camp statistics as well as Feast of Tabernacles statistics.

Camps:

Seven pre-teen and five teen camps served 920 campers and 911 staff members in a millennium-like setting. Overall camp director has changed from Mr. Len Martin to Mr. Aaron Creech. Next year’s camp preparation is well underway, and Mr. Elliott noted that it was a joy watching these directors work together to create the most effective program for our youth.

Feast of Tabernacles: 13,577 attended the Feast at 87 different festival sites and satellite sites. Mr. Elliott thanked all who had a part in offering successful Feast sites around the world. He then turned over the meeting to the Operation Managers to give their reports.

Operation Manager Reports:

Ministerial and Member Services (MMS)—Steve Myers

Mr. Myers began by referring to Isaiah 58:12, “Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.” Further expressing that the Church needs to “build” and “raise up” leaders, support families, and to prepare the next generation. He then covered MMS’s efforts to meet the ministerial manpower by giving the following statistics.

- There is a total of 401 elders, which is an increase of five (289 United States and 112 international).
- There are 75 pastors (54 full time, which is an increase of one).
- There are seven assistant pastors.
- Mr. Greg Dillum is now the assistant pastor for Mr. Doug Collison.
- Mr. Jason Musgrove is now the pastor for Chattanooga, TN, Gadsden, AL and Rome, GA congregations.
- Mr. Marcus Lucas is now the pastor for the Jacksonville and Orlando, FL congregations.
- Mr. Joe Neff is now the assistant pastor for Mr. Paul Moody.
- There have been seven new ordinations and one re-credentialing.
- There are currently 172 congregations and 14 Bible study groups in the United States, and 223 international congregations.
- There has been an 150% increase in baptisms in the United States since May.
- There were 75 primary Feast sites around the world, with an additional 14 satellite sites in the United States (there were also webcast and phone-in options).
- In-person and remote attendance has been consistent.

Mr. Myers asked for prayers for families who have lost loved ones and specifically mentioned the loss of Mr. Homer Moore (survived by his wife, Anna), Mr. Rainer Salomaa (survived by his wife, Claudia) and Mrs. Sue Crow (survived by her husband, Fred).

Mr. Myers then reported on the progress made by the many camp directors who met together at the home office in preparation for next year's camps. The theme for next year is "Follow Me." Mr. Myers asked for all to pray boldly for God to raise up workers for His great and glorious work.

Media and Communications Services—Scott Delamater

Mr. Scott Delamater from Media and Communications Services shared the importance of keeping up the search for and implementing the best platforms for technology to best serve the ever-changing and diverse needs of those we serve.

He then went over various directives, including:

- Staffing needs: We have advertised for a new staff writer and will soon advertise for a Senior Manager for Marketing position.
- Publishing a New Testament commentary, currently working on the Book of Acts.
- Exploring podcast formats—Two pilots are currently in progress.
- We have added AI search to ucg.org.
- We are adding new ABC classes online—17 are finished with a goal of one more each week.
- We are planning Blitz ads in key cities.
- We are in the planning phase of developing a member volunteer network.
- We are in the planning phase of exploring new proclamation channels.

Mr. Delamater then opened the floor for questions.

Treasurer's Report—Ted Budge

Mr. Budge began by saying that Financial Services is seeking to become the Gold Standard of non-profit entities. He would like other non-profits to look to UCG for ways to adopt a similar Gold Standard once UCG reaches that status. He then expressed his complete trust in the Financial Manager's abilities, as evidenced by her exceptional work. He turned over his time to Mrs. Linda Api to explain the data found on the November Financial Dashboard.

Mrs. Api explained several graphs and showed that the Church is maintaining a similar income to previous years and that we are below budget for expenses.

Mr. Budge returned and explained that to reach the Gold Standard we need to develop Debt and Investment Policies. He then explained that debt and investment policies would help with answering questions such as:

- How can congregations in urban areas, or wherever property costs are high, ever afford to have their own building?
- Should we consider a mix of local funds, central funds and debt when financing properties?
- How much debt on the organization's balance sheet should be from reserves, income or other sources?
- What should the investment policy be, so it has a Biblical foundation?
- What is the fiduciary duty of the Church when it has funds that are available for investment?
- What are the best practices?

When Mr. Budge opened the floor for comments. All comments from the Council members were in favor of developing a Debt Policy and an Investment Policy.

Committee Chairmen Reports:

Doctrine Committee (DC)—Rex Sexton

Mr. Sexton explained that the committee has almost finalized the paper on the Last Great Day/Eighth Day and has finished working on the material from the 2015 study. He mentioned that more information on these topics will be given later by Mr. de Campos.

In addition to these items, Mr. Sexton said that the Doctrine Committee has received papers on Carrying Firearms and on the modern Tribes of Israel.

Mr. Sexton mentioned that the Doctrine Committee plans to have a paper on the Night to Be Much Observed ready for discussion at the February meetings.

Members of the DC: Jorge de Campos, Len Martin, Gary Petty and Rex Sexton (chair).

Education Committee (EC)—Aaron Dean

Mr. Dean stated that the Education Committee is still working on the paper on Marriage. He said that discussions are still needed to refine our stance on marrying outside the faith. He mentioned that we know what best practice is according to God's word, but how to handle people who don't always practice best practice is still being discussed.

Mr. Dean said the education committee is in the early stages of working on a paper on slavery. He said this paper is being written because there have been questions on why God allowed slavery, as it is mentioned in the Bible. He explained that God set rules, but that the word "slavery" in the Bible did not have the wrong baggage or meaning that the word has in our modern world. He pointed out that when God talks about servitude and sins of mistreatment, he specifically mentions "remember you were slaves in Egypt." He said this will also be covered in the paper.

Members of the EC: Aaron Dean (chair), Peter Eddington, Darris McNeely, Gary Petty and Paul Wasilkoff.

Ethics Committee—Victor Kubik

Mr. Kubik said, “We have no ethics,” as a humorous way of saying the Ethics Committee has no business to report.

Members of the Ethics Committee: Scott Ashley, Dan Dowd, Peter Eddington, Victor Kubik (chair) and Rex Sexton.

Media Committee (MC)—Jorge de Campos

Mr. de Campos began by congratulating Scott Delameter on his appointment and welcomed him to the home office. He said he was impressed at how quickly Mr. Delameter came onboard and how he hit the ground running with such a complicated job, and it is clear that Mr. Delameter understands the job.

Mr. de Campos emphasized that the Media Committee knows to “stay in their lane”. He said the Media Committee has a responsibility to work together with the Media Department, sharing communications but they don’t get involved in the day-to-day activities. Mr. de Campos said the Media Committee’s message to the Media Department is that we are here to serve you, advise you, but not to interfere. Mr. de Campos said the Committee wants to work together as a team to serve God.

Members of the Media Committee: Scott Ashley, Jorge de Campos (chair), Gary Petty and Paul Wasilkoff.

Roles and Rules Committee (RRC)—Dan Dowd

Mr. Dowd began by mentioning that the RRC has been working on preparing a question for the GCE to answer regarding the Fundamental Beliefs section on Military Service and War. He then turned it over to Mr. Len Martin to lead the discussion.

Mr. Martin said the question the RRC is working on will require a vote from the GCE. Mr. Martin said the question is not for the COE to decide, but it is something the GCE has the authority, alone, to decide.

Mr. Martin referred to the Fundamental Beliefs statement, “We believe that Christians are forbidden by the commandments of God from taking human life, directly or indirectly, and that bearing arms is contrary to this fundamental belief. Therefore, we believe that Christians should not voluntarily become engaged in military service. If they are involuntarily engaged in military service, we believe they should refuse conscientiously to bear arms and, to the extent possible, to refuse to come under military authority.”

He explained that as it is worded, it contains the blanket statement that “bearing arms is contrary to this fundamental belief,” making no distinction between “bearing arms” in military service or for such purposes as law enforcement, peace officer, security guard or self-defense.

Mr. Martin projected the question on the screen, and the Council edited it in real time. Editing was not finalized, but the question was basically asking if “bearing arms” pertains to military service only, or is it intended in the broader sense to include police work, personal use, hunting, etc.?

Mr. Martin wanted the GCE to know that the COE is not weighing in on this subject and is not taking any position.

Mr. Martin also said that the COE doesn’t want the Elder’s Forum to be for swaying votes in regard to this question, which will be given to the GCE for a vote in May 2026.

Members of the RRC: Scott Ashley, Dan Dowd (chair), Len Martin and Paul Wasilkoff.

Strategic Planning and Finance Committee (SPFC)—Darris McNeely

Mr. McNeely explained that every three years, the strategic plan is revised. He said the Council and Church administration met together in November and hired Michael Wilkinson, a consultant the Church has worked with in the past, to help them with their upcoming work on the strategic plan. He said work will continue with a goal of having the COE approve the plan at the February meetings.

Mr. McNeely said that as a result of this planning, the Council put together a large briefing book that should prove to be a most helpful resource going forward. He said this book included the member survey, the employee survey and ministerial surveys, which will provide a good snapshot of the state of UCG. He said the document is confidential.

Mr. McNeely said that the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee is also working on a possible sabbatical program for employees, as well as updates to our current compensation policy. He said the update to our compensation policy will be discussed later today, and the proposal for an international building policy will be discussed during this update.

Mr. McNeely then turned the report over to Mr. Victor Kubik to walk through the proposed International Building policy.

Mr. Kubik began by noting that some international areas have already built church buildings on their own, and in these cases, they make their own decisions. He said some countries will not let a church meet unless it has a building. He said the United States has helped some international areas financially to build, sometimes with as little as \$5,000. He continued that they have had a request for a substantial amount in one particular international area. He said that an International Building policy could answer questions about when and how much to help. He also explained that this policy would only apply to those requesting financial assistance from the home office. He further explained that some facilities have been built by Good Works or LifeNets, and those

facilities are under UCGIA. Some of the international buildings owned by the Church in the international areas will never be able to be sold because they are on land that is not owned by the Church.

Employee and Pastoral Compensation Program

Mr. Eddington, with the help of Mr. Chris Rowland, walked the Council through a section of compensation program that had not yet been approved. The section relates to supplemental pay given to those pastors who live in a higher cost of living area.

He then explained that in simple terms, each pastor receives a base salary. Then, a geographical subsidy is considered if the pastor lives in an area (based on zip code) where the cost of living is 4% or more than the national average. If a pastor moves from the higher cost area, that subsidy will no longer be provided.

The Council discussed the policy update and voted to adopt the Employee and Pastoral Compensation Program with the goal of recalculating the base salary and the cost-of-living subsidy yearly.

The Council then entered Executive Session to discuss the following topics:

- Financial planning (Budge/Api).
- Legal update (Pastor).
- Review retirement policy exception (Pebworth).
- Ordination/credentialing (Myers).
- Review of building purchase (Martin).

At 7:41 p.m. the Council adjourned for the day.

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Chairman Pebworth called the morning session to order at 8:30 a.m. Eastern. Jim Pastor opened the meeting with prayer. All 12 Council members were present.

Proposed Bylaw Amendment—Conflict of Interest

Mr. Pebworth then turned the meeting over to Dan Dowd, who noted that this year, there is only one proposed bylaw amendment for the GCE to consider. He began by reading the amendment. He reminded the Council that the amendment can move forward for consideration by the GCE with a minimum of four votes. If there are not at least four votes, then the amendment must be sent to the GCE asking if at least 25% of the GCE members desire that the proposed amendment be placed on the ballot. After some discussion a vote was taken. There were more than four votes, so it moved forward. There will be a statement of concern written for those who feel the amendment is not advisable.

At 8:46 a.m., the Council went into Executive Session.

At 9:20 a.m., the Executive Session ended.

Last Great Day/Eighth Day Study Paper

Mr. de Campos then hosted a discussion on the Last Great Day/Eighth Day Study Paper. He said our long-standing belief has been that the Eighth Day/Last Great Day has a special meaning of the resurrection. Our belief has also been that John 7:37 records a statement made on the Eighth Day/Last Great Day.

He shared that in 2002; the Council approved a study paper that changed our teaching on this subject by saying that the statement in John 7:37 occurred on the seventh day of the Feast. Then, in 2015, the Council revoked the 2002 paper and approved a study paper that stated that we could not know whether the statement was made on the seventh or the Eighth Day. He said that neither the 2002 nor the 2015 paper conformed to our historical teaching.

In discussions, some Council members expressed that the Council didn't have the authority to alter our historical teaching and, therefore, the 2002 and 2015 papers that were written should not have been accepted. The idea being that a change like this should fall under the authority of the GCE.

Mr. de Campos said the current Study Paper reaffirms our traditional teaching, and he said the Doctrinal Committee recommends it to be approved.

Mr. de Campos then read through the Eighth Day/Last Great Day proposed paper. The presentation was followed by a discussion, with some supporting the paper and others expressing concern. After reading through the paper and making edits, the Council voted with a two-thirds majority to approve the paper.

Report from External Auditors (Clark Schaefer Hackett)

Financial Services Operation Manager, Linda Api, introduced Michael Cullum from the auditing firm, Clark Schaefer and Hackett, for a discussion of the results of their audit of the fiscal year 2025 financial statements.

Mr. Cullum expressed thanks for the good relationship the firm has had with UCGIA over many years. He then shared that the firm provides a "clean opinion" on the financial statements reviewed.

Their audit found no weaknesses, the books were in great shape, and they had no disagreements with management. They said everything went very smoothly.

They said cash is up 3 million. Property assets were down slightly due to depreciation. Liabilities were very similar to the previous year.

Comparing this audit to 2019 shows tremendous growth and improvements to our financial health.

The auditing firm gave some advice going forward; they said giving some more thought to cybersecurity would be prudent. Cyber insurance is helpful, but it doesn't prevent a company from being shut down in the case of a successful cyber-attack. There is so much more to a security breach than dollars alone.

The biggest threat comes from people unknowingly allowing fraud to occur. Training people to have awareness and an understanding of how security breaches occur will go a long way in protecting our information and systems.

We should have checks and balances that include segregation of duties so that one person doesn't have more computer clearances than is necessary.

Another area to address is how to handle unusual donations, such as from cryptocurrencies.

At 11:45 a.m., the Council went into Executive Session to ballot on ordinations and recredentialing, and to discuss a "Toward Rewards Framework" for employees.

At 1:35 p.m., the Executive Session ended.

Roles and Rules Committee (RRC)—Compensation Policy

Mr. Martin began by providing background to the topic, specifically that a proposal had previously been put forward that the Council consider forming a compensation committee. The scope of this compensation committee would include the following eight items.

- Set annual compensation target.
- Oversee agreed-upon increases.
- Determine % of budget for increasing salaries (more than just COLA).
- Annual updates to job description pay ranges.
- Provide oversight for geographical differences in pay.
- Policies for parsonage home purchases.
- Policies for benefits.
- Policies for pay grade demotions (Three-year glide path for the reduction).

Mr. Martin said the Council already has six committees, and some Council members feel that creating another committee would put a strain on the Council.

Mr. Martin said the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee (SPFC) believe that most of the eight items are already being evaluated by certain members of the administration. He mentioned that we could suggest to the administration that a formal committee of the administration be formed and that this committee would have responsibility for the first five of the eight items. The final three items are related to policy, and those items could be included in the scope of the

Strategic Planning Committee. Mr. Martin shared specific roles from the administration that could be included on the Administrative Compensation Committee.

The Council agreed to support a resolution that could be voted on at the end of the day, asking the President to form such a committee. It was also agreed to vote later in the day on a recommendation to remand the Strategic Planning and Finance Committee the task of updating their role to include key compensation oversight, including the final three items on the list. The Council agreed that the Administrative Committee should meet with the SPFC at least twice per year, and the Council would like to see this committee formed by January 15, 2026.

Council Travel Policy

Mr. Pebworth explained that each Council member has a formal budget of \$1,500 to travel and visit local congregations. The main intent is to visit congregations that rarely receive visitors. Mr. Pebworth said this is a budget item that is not fully used. He suggested that more on the Council could use this budget and visit more congregations. He said that we need to have some way to keep track of this budgeted item and allow more visits to underserved congregations. It was also mentioned that this amount has not been changed since 2000, and so it may be time to look at increasing this amount. There was a suggestion made that the Chairman should be notified of Council requests for visits, and when a Council member would like to exceed his personal budget, the Chairman could approve or not approve that request based on whether there is sufficient overall budget.

Mr. Rowland shared that there is an existing Council travel policy, and Mr. Pebworth said (and the Council agreed) that he will work with Mr. Rowland on updating the policy. In terms of any changes to the amount allotted for Council travel, it was agreed he would work with the treasurer to ensure it fit within the overall budget framework.

At 2:27 p.m., the Council went into Executive Session to discuss our Affiliation with other Religious Organizations (Martin, Pebworth) and Social Media Posting (Myers).

At 4:14 p.m., the Executive Session ended.

When the Council came out of Executive Session, six resolutions were reviewed. Mr. Pebworth presented the first three, and Mr. Martin presented the last three.

- The Capitalization Policy (Dr. Jim Pastor, Council attorney, reviewed this and the subsequent two policies). The Council reviewed and edited the proposed resolution. A vote was held, and the resolution to develop a capitalization policy was approved unanimously.
- Debt Policy. The Council reviewed and edited the proposed resolution. A vote was held and the resolution to develop a debt policy was approved unanimously.
- Investment Policy. The Council reviewed and edited the proposed resolution. A vote was held and the resolution to develop a investment policy was approved unanimously.
- A resolution to form a Standing Compensation Committee formed by the Administration was unanimously approved.

- Resolution for the SPFC to be the primary liaison with the Administration's Compensation Committee and to update its scope to include compensation policy was approved unanimously.
- Resolution to rescind the 2015 study paper on the Eighth Day/Last Great Day was approved.

Mr. Eddington then suggested a date for the 2028 General Conference of Elders meeting. He suggested May 6th through the 8th. The proposed date was discussed, subsequently voted on and approved unanimously.

Mr. Pebworth then closed by thanking members for a productive four days of meetings and encouraged members to send an encouraging note to another Council member expressing their appreciation for something that they contributed during these December meetings.

At 4:53 p.m., the Council adjourned the COE meetings.

-end-

Council Reporter

Kevin Kenady

[These are not the official minutes from the council meeting. Elders can find those at the Home Office with the Council Secretary. Video recordings are posted for the elders on the UCG Ministerial Resource Site.]

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