

United Church of God, *an International Association*
Council of Elders Quarterly Meeting Report
Milford, Ohio
Monday, February 23

Chairman Tim Pebworth called the morning session to order at 9 a.m. Eastern. A Council member opened with prayer.

All twelve Council members were present. Scott Ashley and Gary Petty were online.

Chairman Pebworth covered the agenda and the minutes from the December meetings and asked for any discussion. The minutes were unanimously approved. Mr. Pebworth then mentioned that the Council did meet on February 10, 2026, covering the topic of cyber security, where the reporter was not present. He said information about that meeting will be circulated later.

President's Report: John Elliott

President John Elliott greeted the Council and began by describing the international nature of the work. He mentioned our responsibility to preach the gospel to the whole world. He was excited to share that we are seeing new growth and excitement in many areas of the world.

Mr. Elliott was enthusiastic about the Strategic Plan that the home office has worked on for nine months to bring to this meeting. He said the plan was developed knowing that the world is changing and society is moving away from God.

Mr. Elliott explained that this plan has markers to judge our progress. He said the employees working on the Operation Plan are experienced and well-qualified to create and implement these plans. He expressed confidence in the home office team to succeed and thanked the Council for accepting the right people to develop action plans with the markers for judging progress.

Mr. Elliott ended by saying that we look to fulfill our responsibility and we will do it with Jesus Christ's help.

Operation Managers Reports:

Ministerial and Member Services (MMS)—Steve Myers

Mr. Myers began by discussing the connections between Nehemiah and what MMS is working on today. He said Nehemiah represented a time of restoration, mobilization and strengthening and quoted Nehemiah 2:17 infused with other scriptures from Nehemiah.

Mr. Myers mentioned that it is MMS's responsibility to support 400 congregations and Bible study groups and 76 United States church pastors. He then emphasized that we have the need to strengthen the ministerial pipeline, which has been a priority.

Mr. Myers provided the following information:

1. Ministerial Manpower — Organizing the Work

- 400 elders worldwide
 - 110 outside the United States
 - 290 in the United States
 - 76 church pastors

2. Ordinations and Ministerial Transitions

New Ordinations

- Martin Kusz — Australia
- Tim Sipes — Portsmouth, Ohio
- Max Spigelmyer — Rome, Georgia
- Vince Wong — Philippines

Recredential

- Mike McKinney — California

Retirements

- Richard Kennebeck — Jacksonville/Orland, Florida

Deaths

- Deceased elders: Carl Anderson, Gordon Hannaway, Gerald Hoyer, Reg Wright
- Deceased wives of elders: Maureen DeLong, Renee Kellers

He said our attendance is steady with small areas of growth. He said we need the resources and tools to create engagement, provide education and to strengthen our members. Mr. Myers then introduced Mr. Corbin Rose to explain the many ways we are doing just this.

Mr. Rose is a web developer in the Information Technology department. Mr. Rose began by showing the youth education platform and explained that the platform is divided up by age, with a kid version and a parent version. Mr. Rose demonstrated the new lessons and explained how these interactive lessons work, including games associated with each lesson.

He said parents are given guidance on how to use the lessons with related Bible verses and other teaching helps.

Mr. Rose said the lessons can be printed and that the goal is to produce 18 levels of lessons. He said parents could either teach it on their own, or have their children complete the lessons on their own and/or it could be used as Sabbath lessons at services.

Then Mr. Rose said we are now offering material in 18 different languages. He then demonstrated some new offerings that have been developed for our hymnal app. He explained

that app users can bring up music specific to individual instruments, use practice files, and pull up music specific to different parts, such as music for alto singers. He explained that now if someone feels the music plays too slow or too fast, they can adjust it to their preferences, and the app can be used without an internet connection. He pointed out that the key the music is played in can be changed, and the music can be set to continuous play for background music. He stated that kids could even have the hymns played in a Mario “game” style.

Mr. Rose said they are working on allowing people to register for events on our website directly, rather than using a third-party platform as we’ve done for the last few years.

He also stated that they are working on “Jelly Activities” with an onscreen coloring book, a game where animals are moved to the appropriate clean or unclean meats columns, and where Jelly teaches in a fun way. There will also be memory scriptures, Bible trivia, videos, and songs to choose from.

Mr. Myers concluded by explaining that all these new opportunities need a team to produce them, which will include many volunteers. He said with God’s help, we will prepare for the future.

Media and Communications Services—Scott Delamater

Mr. Scott Delamater began by mentioning that we should go into all the world and preach the gospel, but less than one in a thousand identify as Christian, and many areas are hostile to a Christian message.

Mr. Delamater mentioned the first directive was to offer ABC classes online, and we have gone from 17 classes to 23 since the December meetings. Our second directive was to make our online content more engaging. He said we are becoming more effective at communicating who UCG is with common branding. He said we are producing a small amount of our media and other publications in other languages, and we are working on increasing the number of languages.

Mr. Delamater mentioned that the New Testament Commentary is in progress, starting with the book of Acts. He said we are also reaching more young adults online with new material and new ways of offering the material. He continued by explaining that we have explored various podcast formats. He said it was also found through this exploration that our members want included in the podcast, something actionable that can be done with the Biblically focused material.

Mr. Delamater also said we have hired a company to analyze our proclamation data including comparing attendance with the number of donors. He said that even when we had disunity and a sudden decrease in attendance (during the time of the split), the number of donors was not affected.

When comparing the number of postal responses and the number of internet responses, Mr. Delamater said the trend in the past has been that the number of internet responses has been going up and the number of postal responses has been going down. He mentioned that the current trend has both online and postal responses increasing, and the increase in online

responses may be helping to increase the postal responses. He also mentioned that adding AI search to ucg.org should be completed this year.

Mr. Delamater said that two new presenters have been chosen and two more are being considered. Those two chosen presenters have not been made public yet.

The media department has made two new hires: Kourtney Kovanis as senior manager of marketing and Emma Cortelyou as staff writer.

Treasurer and Financial Services Report—Ted Budge and Linda Api

Mr. Ted Budge thanked everyone for their concern, support and prayers after he lost his home to fires last year; he mentioned that they've received the permits to break ground on their new home. He then introduced Mrs. Api for her report.

Mrs. Linda Api went through a very detailed budget spreadsheet, explaining the most recent financial results both for January 2026 and the fiscal year to date results (period July 2025 to January 2026), comparing those results to the budget. Further explaining that we are well within budget as far as income, expenses and expenditures. Mr. Budge also mentioned that they are very confident that all is well regarding our financial position and we will end the year as expected.

Mr. Budge then explained in detail why it would be prudent to have a Capital Plan. He explained that there have been several congregations that have requested help in purchasing church buildings, but there is no current policy in place. Mr. Budge suggested that the administration form a capital advisory team to develop a comprehensive five to ten-year capital plan. He stressed the scriptural foundation from Luke 14:28-30, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?"

He went on to stress external best practices for nonprofit capital planning and the Council's fiduciary duty of care. His key elements included:

- Assessing the current inventory of 19 church-owned properties (with insured values provided; not market values).
- Evaluating full ownership costs (utilities, maintenance, insurance) and life cycle needs (e.g., replacements for HVAC systems).
- Projecting capital expenditures (long-term benefits, capitalized on a balance sheet) versus operational expenses (current-period benefits).
- Considering funding sources: cash reserves, congregational support, surpluses and limited debt (with careful evaluation of debt capacity).
- Prioritizing regional facilities (e.g., camps, regional centers) over individual congregation buildings.

Mr. Budge recommended pausing new property purchases for three to six months to prevent reactive or unwise decisions, with an exception for clearly “God-driven” or obviously wise opportunities.

He said there should be a discussion regarding priorities (e.g., camps and regional centers first), scope (starting with real estate but potentially extending to intellectual property like apps), historical ad-hoc purchases, and international variations.

Mr. Budge said the policy could be a five to ten-year projection which takes into consideration facility condition, deferred maintenance, estimated life cycle replacement and possible funding sources. And he said it should integrate with the annual operating budget.

During the discussion, it was suggested that no new plans to purchase buildings are accepted until this Capital Plan is in place. It was mentioned that requests for purchasing more buildings are coming at a steady rate. Mr. Budge agreed to write a resolution that the Council could consider and review and approve authorizing the creation of a Capital Plan.

Committee Chairman Reports:

Doctrine Committee (DC)—Rex Sexton

Mr. Sexton began by reporting that the DC has several unfinished projects:

- Carrying Firearms— This is a Council-generated study on the subject that resulted from the recognition that there have been several interpretations of UCG’s doctrinal statement. The committee has compiled all of the historical information, and these documents will be provided to the entire Council.
- Review of the evidence on the modern Tribes of Israel—this is currently being reviewed
- Questions referred to the Doctrine Committee about the meaning of “Observe” in Exodus 12:42, referring to the Night to be Much Observed. This project should be completed by the end of these current meetings.

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

Education Committee (EC)—Aaron Dean

Chairman Pebworth introduced Mr. Aaron Dean to give the Education Committee report. Mr. Dean said the EC has two ongoing projects: the paper on marriage and a paper on slavery.

- Regarding the marriage paper, the country’s (United States specifically) backlash against the “woke” agenda seems to have edged closer to identifying two genders, male and female, but still not as God created them. We know the best practice is to follow God’s word, including marrying within the faith, but how do we address people who don’t always follow the biblical standard?

- Regarding the paper on slavery, this originated from questions raised in a “Magnified” episode regarding biblical references to slavery. It explains that what the Bible describes as “slavery” is more accurately indentured servitude—often due to debt, poverty or crime—rather than chattel slavery or lifelong abusive ownership. The paper will emphasize God’s protective rules: servants were to be treated well, educated and released (e.g., provisions like the Jubilee year for freedom and land return). Further, it contrasts biblical principles with human systems influenced by Satan, which often involve mistreatment.

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

Ethics Committee Report—Victor Kubik

Mr. Kubik relayed that there was no new business for the Ethics Committee.

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 said that he had nothing to add to Mr. Delamater’s report.

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 highlighted ongoing work stemming from prior meetings and outlined immediate next steps on those projects.

1. A new Job Description for Council of Elders Members
 - The committee developed a draft job description for COE members, now posted on the SharePoint site (Council dashboard).
 - Purpose: To clearly define expectations for service on the Council, helping both current members and potential future ones understand the expectations required to be a Council member.
 - Discussion of the draft is scheduled for Wednesday during the current meetings.
2. Annual Reviews of the President and the Secretary
 - Following the conclusion of the current meetings, Dan Dowd will distribute materials for the annual performance reviews of the president (John Elliott) and the secretary (Frank Dunkle).
 - According to our defined process, the reviews are planned for May 2026.

Mr. Dowd then turned the meeting over to Mr. Len Martin to cover a remanded matter concerning our Military Service and War Fundamental Belief.

- The committee was tasked with preparing a ballot item for the GCE on interpreting the Fundamental Belief 2.1.14, triggered by a question from the field (e.g., about members serving in roles that require carrying firearms).
- Work included email exchanges and a Zoom meeting among committee members to discuss nuances and the historical context.
- The Committee recommended not putting a ballot forward while the committee continues refining guidance.

Mr. Martin concluded by stating that there is so much nuance to this statement that we are not ready for a ballot. Instead, the Council should consider a deeper review of the entire topic, to be sure our statement is clear and accurate.

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

At 12:03 p.m., the Council took a break for lunch.

At 1 p.m., Chairman Pebworth called the Council to order and a Council member opened with prayer.

Strategic Planning and Finance Committee (SPFC)—Darris McNeely

Prior to this presentation, a 32-page document titled “A Scripture-Centric Strategic Plan – Operation Plan – Budget for ‘the Work’ of God,” and a 38-page document titled “Administration Action Plans” were provided to all Council members

Mr. McNeely began by reviewing the work of the Committee over the last quarter and then he turned to a discussion of the Strategic Plan, Operational Plan, and Budget. He mentioned the extensive work that has been put into these documents for the past six months. He mentioned that member surveys, employee surveys and ministerial surveys were part of the planning and that these surveys give a snapshot picture of the United Church of God. He said they began with the Vision and Mission Statements, along with the Positioning Statements. He said these items help answer the questions of who we are, what we believe and what we do.

He stated our four goals:

1. Discipleship (previously Public Proclamation).
2. Fellowship (previously Congregational Care).
3. Leadership
4. Stewardship (previously Organizational Stewardship)

The Fellowship and Leadership material incorporated feedback from the member surveys, ministerial surveys and employee surveys. Mr. McNeely said he hoped it would be conveyed to our church members that these plans reflect a practical response to how our members perceive

things and how they sincerely desire to serve, be a part of, engage with, and see improvement in the life of the Church.

Mr. McNeely stated that these plans reflect what we will be doing for the next three years, and that we have set benchmarks to demonstrate where we are and where we want to be with improvements each year.

Finally, he said this plan will have action plans included, but the specific action plans will not be voted on by the COE or GCE, as the action plans can be adjusted as they fine-tune the plan and facilitate improvement and can be quantified for review.

Mr. McNeely turned the meeting over to Mr. Elliott to discuss the objectives and action plans. Mr. Elliott mentioned that the objectives will have measurable outcomes, success factors and action steps. He then introduced Mr. Delamater as Media and Communication Services to cover Discipleship.

Mr. Delamater began by identifying the four goals of Discipleship:

1. Show how the Word works.
2. Proclaim the depth of the Word.
3. Encourage a relationship with God through His Word.
4. Focus on the basics of God's Word.

Mr. Delamater then went into detail what was covered in the document, showing how the Media and Communication Services team will be judged by how they improve and how this improvement will come by following the measurable action plans which are all listed in the Strategic Plan. Mr. Delamater spoke about increasing the time individuals spend with our material and increasing the number of visitors to all our forms of media, including youth, members and non-members.

Mr. Delamater then turned the meeting over to Mr. Steve Myers to continue the discussion of the Strategic Plan. Mr. Myers relayed his responsibilities within the plan. He said he would be talking about the goals of Fellowship and Leadership. He said this includes congregational care, developing leadership in our members and improving leadership in the ministry. He said strong relationships and a strong Church include leadership, fellowship, effective teaching, engagement and youth retention. Mr. Myers then outlined the objectives and the action plans that will help us develop a loving culture, higher engagement, improve biblical knowledge, increase service participation, and create balanced teaching (between prophecy, doctrine and Christian living).

At 3:30 p.m., the Council entered Executive Session as per the agenda and to review ordination and hiring requests.

The Council came out of Executive Session at 5:35 p.m. and closed the day's session with prayer.

Tuesday, February 24

Chairman Pebworth called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. Eastern. A Council member opened the meeting with prayer. Ten Council members were present, with Scott Ashley and Gary Petty online.

Strategic and Operation Plan Review—Steve Myers

Mr. Pebworth introduced Mr. Myers to continue discussing the Strategic Plan and specifically the Leadership goal.

Mr. Myers mentioned the objectives for Leadership:

- Promoting dedication to God’s Word among the eldership.
- Instructing in delivering inspiring and compelling messages.
- Providing mentoring, coaching and continuous development.

He then mentioned the two objectives which are to increase member satisfaction with messages and increase the number of elders using/accessing online resources. Mr. Myers then went into more detail using the Strategic Plan document.

Mr. Elliott was then introduced to discuss the four goals of Stewardship. Mr. Elliott began by mentioning that one of the objectives included improving how the ministry views how we are doing; these objectives are based on the 23 questions that were on the minister’s survey relative to our foundational values. He also mentioned other objectives such as increasing the unity among employees, faithfully utilizing God’s funds by staying within budget, increasing employee satisfaction and increasing the trust of donors. Mr. Elliott then went into details, including the strategies and action steps in the Strategic Plan document.

Budget Review—Ted Budge/Linda Api

Mr. Budge stated that for the fiscal year of 2027, the proposed Revenue, Gains and Other Support has been set using a conservative estimate based on the last five years. He said general contributions and Holy Day Offerings comprise 82.5% of the fiscal year 2027 budget, and this is an increase.

Mr. Budge then introduced Mrs. Api, who started by stating that we have a balanced budget. She then brought up the detailed budget, which was based on looking at the past five years and includes an increase in income and expenses (notably several new positions and ministerial trainees).

It was mentioned that there was a decrease in advertising based on consulting information that encouraged a move to more effective platforms.

Mrs. Api then focused on explaining all significant increases or decreases as compared to the previous year.

Mr. Budge said we should be comfortable with this new budget because it is based on a conservative approach.

At 12 p.m., the Council paused for lunch.

Proposed Debt Policy review—Ted Budge/Linda Api

At 1:07 p.m., Chairman Pebworth called the Council to order and asked Mr. Len Martin to ask the prayer for the afternoon meetings.

Mr. Budge said a Debt Policy is needed to formulate a complete Capital Budget/Capital Plan. He explained five reasons to use debt. He also mentioned scriptures that should be taken into consideration before making a debt policy. Mr. Budge then covered the reasons to have a policy, the guiding principles of a good policy, including six guardrails that should be included in any debt policy.

The Council unanimously approved the Debt Policy Mr. Budge presented.

Then Mr. Budge presented a resolution for the Council to review. The resolution was for the establishment of a Capital Planning Framework with the goal of eventually creating a Capital Plan.

The Council voted unanimously to adopt the resolution Mr. Budge presented.

Then Linda Api was introduced to discuss the 1997 Council Financial Calendar, which determines when the budget should be presented to the Council, among other action items. It was discussed that this calendar has not been used for many years, and Mrs. Api said it wasn't useful, so it was moved that this 1997 resolution be rescinded. The vote was unanimous to rescind.

Council Conference Room Technology Upgrade—Tim Pebworth and Scott Delamater

Mr. Pebworth discussed the reason the Council conference room needed improvements. Improvements which would not only help the Council with their duties, but it would also help the home office, ABC and other entities. The Council then voted on a resolution to allow a plan for a conference room technology upgrade to be developed by the administration and presented to the Council for consideration. The resolution passed with 11 for the resolution with one abstention.

Resolution to Increase the Council Travel Budget—Tim Pebworth

Mr. Pebworth explained that the reason for a Council travel budget was to allow (and encourage) Council members to visit congregations, especially ones that get few such visitors, to give encouragement to the members and ministers and/or to give a pastor a break and to spiritually strengthen the members and ministry of the Church. He mentioned reasons why an increase was

needed including inflation impacts since the budget was established in 2016. The resolution to increase the Council travel budget from \$1,500 to \$2,500, passed with a unanimous yes vote.

At 3:27 p.m., the Council entered Executive Session to discuss the annual review of Discretionary Retirement Assistance and the annual review of Salary Ranges.

The Executive Session and the meetings for the day ended at 6:12 p.m.

Wednesday, February 25

Chairman Pebworth called the Council to order at 9 a.m. Eastern. The meeting was opened with prayer by a Council member. Ten Council members were present in person, with Scott Ashley and Gary Petty online. The Council entered Executive Session following the published agenda, which began with a Legal update.

At 3:03 p.m., the Executive Session ended.

May 2026 GCE Annual Meeting Update—Charles Melear

Mr. Melear provided an outline for the meetings, meals and other events. He mentioned that a change for this year is that instead of a Sabbath morning Bible Study, we will be having time set aside for fellowship as a way to offer more time for elders and wives to fellowship. He said the services will be at 2 p.m. Eastern this year. He also mentioned that the sermon givers have not been chosen.

Mr. Melear said the Saturday night group dinner will be without the usual dedication to deceased elders, but a truncated presentation will be done on Sunday morning. He also said a book written by Michael Wilkinson will be given to attendees, which will cover the material he speaks on as a guest speaker.

It was mentioned that Mr. Budge will give the required budget report, including the reporting of salary levels. There will also be a presentation given by Mrs. Api that will cover more budget details for anyone interested.

Mr. Melear mentioned that the theme will be “Enhancing Ministerial Skills.” The Council voted unanimously to accept the proposed agenda for the GCE annual meeting.

Proposed Update to Menti.com Usage During the May GCE Meeting—Tim Pebworth

Mr. Pebworth said this discussion was for the usage rules for Menti at the annual GCE meeting. He said our current approach is not to monitor elders’ input for Menti. He further explained that we did have two monitors at the recent elder’s check-in, and then he gave examples of GCE questions that were altered. He showed two questions that were almost identical and said they were combined into one. One benefit to combining them was that the vote was not split and the single question rose to the top quicker. One example was so unclear that it couldn’t be answered

readily. With a small tweak, it became clear. He also showed a question that imputed motive when it could have been asked without any offense.

Mr. Pebworth asked if we should allow light moderation. He said we could ask the GCE if that would be acceptable. Mr. Rowland said he was one of the moderators, and the two moderators agreed to only change a question if they both agreed with the change. It was mentioned that very few questions had to be altered.

Job Description for a Council of Elders Position—Dan Dowd

Mr. Dowd explained that elders should understand the responsibilities before agreeing to accept such a position.

The draft job description was put forward to be remanded to the Roles and Rules Committee for further refinement before being brought back to the Council for approval. Mr. Dowd read the job description and highlighted two key changes. He said the additions were that a candidate must speak English and he must have the right paperwork to enter the country to allow them to attend meetings. Discussion amongst the Council members included the comment that since these additions are not required in the bylaws, this should be approved by the GCE. Another comment was that a member who is a non-English speaker or someone who can't attend would not be able to contribute. Another member mentioned that we would have to define what is meant by being able to speak English. Then, members voted unanimously to remand this to the Roles and Rules Committee for review.

General Updates from Mr. John Elliott

The meeting was turned over to Mr. Elliott for him to share a few updates. The first update was whether there would be a live church service transmission during the Feast of Tabernacles this year. He said the administration staff would need to make plans regarding staffing at a specific Feast site if we are going to have live transmissions. He said a live transmission is often difficult in various areas of the world because of all the different time zones and other technical problems. Mr. Elliott said he could record a short message that could be played on the opening evening message or sometime during the Feast if the festival coordinator wanted to use it. He said this would give his staff the opportunity to enjoy their family at the Feast site of their choosing. He said a recording could be translated for international sites beforehand, and that would be helpful.

The Council agreed that there would be no live transmission.

A closing prayer and the blessing on the evening meal was given.

At 5:26 p.m., the meeting adjourned for the day.

Thursday, February 26

Chairman Pebworth called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Eastern. All twelve Council members were present; Scott Ashley and Gary Petty were online. The Council immediately entered Executive Session.

At 11:15 a.m., the Executive Session ended.

Sabbatical Program Review—Darris McNeely

The Council came out of executive session at 10:50 am and Mr. Pebworth introduced Mr. McNeely to talk about the sabbatical program. Mr. McNeely said the idea of a Sabbatical program, after a set number of years working, could allow employees to take an extended leave to travel, pursue an educational opportunity, for health or other reasons.

Discussion began with several examples given of different Sabbatical Programs. One council member mentioned specific men in the Bible and asked if they took a break of this type. A proposal was put forward to research extended leave with the purpose of putting forth a Sabbatical Plan to consider. The Council voted to create a committee to study what a Sabbatical Plan could encompass for consideration by the Council. There were 11 yes votes, one no vote.

Balloting on the Strategic, Plan, Operation Plan and Budget—Tim Pebworth

- A vote was called to accept The Strategic Plan as written. There were 10 yes votes, one abstained and one voted no.
- A vote was called to the Operation Plan as written. There were 11 yes votes, and one voted no.
- A vote was called to accept the Budget as presented. It was accepted unanimously.

Mr. Pebworth asked if anyone needed to add anything and Mr. Delamater noted that Mr. Dan Preston will move from being the editor of Compass Check to being the editor for Beyond Today Magazine.

Mr. Pebworth said the next Council meetings will be conducted from May 5, 2026, through May 7, 2026.

A Council member concluded the meetings with prayer.

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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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