

# **United Church of God, *an International Association***

## **Council of Elders Quarterly Meeting Report**

**Milford, Ohio**

**Monday, December 3, 2018**

*\*These are not the official minutes from the Council meeting. The official minutes are filed at the Home Office with the Council Secretary.*

Chairman Don Ward called the morning session to order at 9:00 a.m. Eastern and the meeting was opened with prayer. All 12 Council of Elders (Council) members were present.

Chairman Ward welcomed everyone. The last Council meeting minutes were approved. The agenda for the week was discussed and approved.

### **President's Report—Victor Kubik**

President Victor Kubik greeted everyone and commented on some of the following major activities:

- The video recording studio was just dedicated last week on Monday, Nov. 26. There is excitement for the new studio with new possibilities in using it.
- Podcasts are a new medium that have been used more frequently to preach the gospel and engage in conversation with our audience. It is an area we would like to cultivate more.
- United Youth Camps had their annual camp director conference at the home office in October. Next summer there will be a new camp in Georgia at Camp Woodland with Jay Ledbetter as the new camp director.
- Boundary Waters Adventure is a new young adult canoeing activity in northeastern Minnesota that will be held in July. Daily interactive Bible studies and leadership training will be the core of the program. Frank Dunkle is the director and Kevin Kenady is the assistant director.
- Ambassador Bible College (ABC) has started a new academic year. This is the 20<sup>th</sup> class. There are 32 students, with one from the Ukraine and four from Australia.
- The Feast of Tabernacles had a total attendance of 13,453. This includes satellite sites but not those in the new program called “Celebrating the Feast at Home.” There were 66 Feast sites around the world, which was the same as 2017. Attendance was down 1.1% from last year.
- The regional pastor's conference was held for a day and a half after the camp director's conference since three of the camp directors are also regional pastors.
- Regional conferences are finishing their third round in Southern California this coming weekend. The new round will start in Atlanta on January 20-22, 2019.
- International Areas were discussed including the Kubiks' recent trip to India and Sri Lanka following the Feast of Tabernacles and Darris McNeely's upcoming international trip to Africa.

### **Operation Manager Reports:**

#### **Media and Communications Services—Peter Eddington**

Peter Eddington went through some of the following statistics as of Nov. 30 this year:

- *United News* circulation is the highest it's ever been since *United* began at 16,788.
- Our coworker count is now at 6,338—6% higher than two years ago and 1.5% less than the same time last year.
- Our donor list includes 7,300 people. Our all-time high was 9,564 in June 2016.
- U.S. *Beyond Today* magazine subscribers are at 258,411. This is just under our September total of 261,408, which was the highest since March 2012. Our U.S. circulation has been right around 250,000 each issue for the past two years.
- Those people on our U.S. file associated with the Church (teens, members, associated attendees) is at 12,418.
- The Church's *Beyond Today* YouTube channel ([youtube.com/user/BeyondTodayTV](https://youtube.com/user/BeyondTodayTV)) has had 9.5 million video views since November 2006, a 50% increase since last December. The channel has 41,243 subscribers (a 188% increase since last December), and hosts 1,868 videos, which is a 13% increase since last December. This is an average of 2,170 videos being watched every day, an increase of 36% since last December.
- The average YouTube views for the past 12 months is 8,846 videos watched per day, an increase of 137% since last December.
- The number of Google, Yahoo and Bing advertising impressions since 2004 stands at 12.1 billion.
- UCG.org is currently ranked the 14th-highest Christian denomination website in the world. In the past we have been as high as 12th.

Some other items Mr. Eddington discussed were:

- **Video Recording Studio:** Wednesday, Nov. 28, we recorded our first programs in the new studio before a live studio audience of around 50 people.
- **Beyond Today TV App for iPhone:** We are excited to announce that a new *Beyond Today* TV app is available for the iPhone. This is in addition to what we currently have available on Roku, Amazon Fire TV and Samsung smart TVs. We are now working on an Android version of the app, which should be available mid-January.
- **Beyond Today Results on YouTube:**
  - 10,777,168 = total number of *Beyond Today* video views on YouTube since inception. This includes *BT* programs, Dailies, Bible Studies and *BT* related videos.
  - 3,159,787 = total number of *Beyond Today* video views on YouTube in past 12 months (Nov. 1, 2017 – Oct. 31, 2018). Almost a third of our total YouTube video views occurred this year!
- **AmazonSmile Donations:** The United Church of God has been issued a \$613 donation from the AmazonSmile Foundation as a result of AmazonSmile program activity between July 1 and Sept. 30, 2018. We can increase our organization's donation potential by spreading the word about AmazonSmile. We need to remind our members that their AmazonSmile shopping can support the United Church of God at no expense to them.

Chairman Ward mentioned that the statistics are encouraging. People in the world are looking for help in so many areas. At this point it is not translating as much as we would like into an increase in church attendance, but the seeds are being sown. One of the key strategic areas to discuss later as a council is how to encourage people in the world to take action once learning God's truth.

### **Ministerial and Member Services (MMS)—Mark Welch**

Mark Welch was introduced as the operation manager of MMS. Mr. Welch expressed his gratitude for being here and explained his timeline for moving to the Cincinnati area by the end of the year.

Mark Welch summarized some manpower changes since the last meeting in August:

- Dennis O'Neill was re-credentialed on Aug. 20. He serves in the Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, congregations.
- Filius Jere was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 1. He and his wife, Chosiwe, serve in the Chipata, Zambia, congregation.
- Victor Hou was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 8. He serves in the San Diego, Calif., congregation.
- Steven Britt was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 10. Mr. Britt was transferred in October to become an assistant pastor for the congregation in Columbia, Maryland, Richmond and Northern Virginia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Delmarva, Delaware, with his wife Danielle.
- Joshua Creech was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 10. Mr. Creech was transferred in October to become an assistant pastor for the congregations in Nashville, Murfreesboro and Jackson, Tennessee, with his wife, Lizzy.
- Jim Call was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 19. He and his wife, Darlene, serve in the Portsmouth, Ohio, congregation.
- Harold Descoteaux was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 24. He and his wife, Sharon, serve in the Montreal, Quebec, Canada, congregation.
- Heinz Wilsberg was ordained into the ministry on Sept. 27. He serves in the Dormagen, Germany, congregation.
- Devin Schulz was transferred at the end of October, and now serves as assistant pastor for the congregations in Kalamazoo, Lansing and Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Upcoming transfers:
  - Mark Welch will be moving to Cincinnati by the end of the year so he can serve more effectively as Operation Manager for MMS.
  - In early 2019, Stan Martin will be transferred from Florida to serve as pastor for the Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, and Lawton, Oklahoma, congregations.
  - After Mr. Martin's transfer, Doug Wendt will relocate to Tampa, Florida, from the Orlando area where he has been serving as an elder alongside pastor Rick Shabi. Mr. Wendt will serve as pastor for the congregations in Tampa and St. Petersburg.
  - Braden Veller will serve as pastor for the Ocala and Vero Beach, Florida, congregations, in addition to his previous assignments of Fort Myers and Tallahassee.
- Since our last meeting one elder has died, Chuck Zimmerman, a retired pastor who was living in Phoenix, Arizona. He died on Nov. 7, 2018.
- One elder's wife has also died, Sandy DeVilbiss, widow of elder Ken DeVilbiss, of the Dayton, Ohio, congregation. She died on Nov. 10, 2018.

Current statistics include:

- Average U.S. Sabbath attendance over the past four months has been between 7,000 and 7,100.
- There are 393 elders in the United Church of God
  - 105 are outside the U.S.
  - 288 are in the U.S.
    - 75 are church pastors
    - 13 are associate or assistant pastors
- 3 ministerial trainees
- 195 churches and Bible study groups in the U.S. (the Savannah, Georgia, Bible study group was discontinued; new congregation in Manhattan, New York).

We had 115 reported baptisms this year through November 2018, giving us a total of 43 baptisms since the August meeting.

## **Treasurer and Financial Services Report—Rick Shabi**

Rick Shabi opened his report by updating the Council on the number of projects that Finance is currently involved in, including tax issues emanating from the Tax Cut and Jobs Acts passed earlier this year, financing options related to the proposed Cincinnati church building acquisition, a new mileage reimbursement system being implemented for church employees, and, of course, budgeting for fiscal 2020, which needs to be completed and presented to the Council during the February meetings.

The annual audit report for fiscal year 2018 (year ended June 30, 2018) has been issued by the independent accounting firm, Clark Schafer and Hackett. Two letters that accompany the audit were discussed with the Council. The first letter addressed internal controls and any adjustments to the accounting records that were required as a result of the audit. The audit firm found no deficiencies in internal control, and no adjustments were required.

The second letter offered an “unqualified” opinion on our financial statements, meaning that as a result of the review, the auditors’ opinion is that our financial reports, both monthly and annual, present fairly the financial position of the Church.

The complete audited financial statements and auditor’s report will be printed in the next issue of United News. Mr. Shabi commented that the partner from our audit firm will be at the Council meetings later that day to make a presentation and answer any further questions.

Mr. Shabi commented that fiscal year 2018 was a very strong year. He publicly expressed gratitude to God for all He continues to provide for His Church, and to the members, donors, and coworkers who faithfully support the Work with their tithes and offerings.

Mr. Shabi then turned the Council’s attention to financial results for the first five months of our current fiscal year (which began July 1), pointing out income and expense “trends” of which the Council and administration should be aware of as the budgeting process for next fiscal year begins. Some discussion ensued in regard to a few unfavorable trends.

Supplemental schedules that contained information on fall holyday offerings and attendance, key operating statistics, and significant expense variances from budget in the current fiscal year were noted.

### **Committee Chairman Reports:**

#### **Education Committee—Aaron Dean**

The Education Committee has not been assigned any new duties. Education programs are still progressing. Some of the programs mentioned were ABC with 32 students, leadership training in Africa later this month, and the goal to help make all countries as close to self-sufficient as possible in manpower and finances.

#### **Doctrine Committee—Mario Seiglie**

There are 15 elders that serve on the Doctrine Committee (DC) and its doctrine advisory and prophecy advisory subcommittees. Since the August 2018 Council meetings, the DC has completed its review of four projects to be discussed on Wednesday. Other papers are still being reviewed and when they are ready will be presented to the Council.

#### **Strategic Planning and Finance Committee—Bob Dick**

The Strategic Planning and Finance Committee is currently between projects. There are no new projects at present. Later this week there will be the review of the strategic plan in preparation for the February meeting.

## **Roles and Rules Committee—Rainer Salomaa**

The Roles and Rules Committee was asked to work on the current policy “Provisional Manner of Approving Official Relationships with Other Religious Organizations.” This will be presented to the Council for input later today.

The next task will be the annual assessment of the president, to be done at the next meeting in February 2019.

## **Media and Communications Committee—Scott Ashley**

Nothing is currently remanded to the Media and Communications Committee (MCC). One ongoing responsibility for the MCC is to review the media operation report before it is given. This was done last week over teleconference.

## **Ethics Committee—John Elliott**

The Council established an Ethics Committee, which shows the vital importance of ethics in all aspects of God’s Church.

The scope of the committee’s work, as directed by the Council, extends to all matters of ethics and ethical conduct within the church organization. The Ethics Committee currently has no projects that have been remanded to it by the Council.

## **External Audit Report—Kerry Roe (auditor)**

Following lunch, Chairman Ward introduced Kerry Roe, who is the President of the accounting firm of Clark Schaefer Hackett and the partner who supervises the Church’s annual audit. Mr. Roe made a presentation to the Council based on financial highlights and analyses from the recent audit. He commented that, based on the audit and their review internal controls and systems, the Council can rely on the accuracy of monthly financial reports generated internally, and that their audit once again resulted in an “unqualified opinion” on the financial statements.

He also commented on the Church’s favorable cash balances and how assets have grown for the sixth straight year, with little change in liabilities, except for new mortgages on purchased church buildings. He answered the few questions that were asked by the Council.

The Council went into planned executive session at 1:15 p.m.

The Council came into open session at 2:50 p.m.

## **Policy of Approving Official Relationships with Other Religious Organizations—Rainer Salomaa**

As the chair of the Roles and Rules Committee (RRC), Rainer Salomaa presented the policy of “Approving Official Relationships with Other Organizations.” This policy was remanded to the RRC in August to review. The current proposed draft was passed out and discussed. After discussion and input for clarity, Chairman Ward thanked the RRC for their wonderful work and remanded it back to the RRC for continued work.

## **Relocation Policy—Rick Shabi**

Rick Shabi led the discussion on how the Tax Cut and Jobs Act has affected certain church employees who relocated at the Church’s request during 2018. New tax law requires all expenses incurred with a move to be

considered taxable income to the employee. As a result, the Church has had to make some adjustments to its current Relocation Policy, which had not been updated since 2004.

Proposed changes and amendments to the Policy were presented to the Council, which led to much discussion. The Council unanimously approved the updated policy. It will be added to the Human Resources Policy Manual and posted on the employee website.

The Council adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

The Council had dinner and then drove to take a tour of the potential Cincinnati church building.

## **Tuesday, December 4, 2018**

Chairman Don Ward called the morning session to order at 9:00 a.m. Eastern and the meeting was opened with prayer. Eleven Council of Elders (Council) members were present. Mario Seiglie joined about 90 minutes later because he was teaching an ABC class.

### **Cincinnati Congregation Church Building Update**

Rick Shabi and Larry Darden led a discussion and provided updates concerning the proposed Cincinnati East Church Building purchase. Under terms of the agreement, another party has a Right of First Refusal on the property that expires December 21. After that date, if the other party chooses not to purchase the property, the inspection, due diligence, and financing aspects of the purchase will begin in earnest.

Details of the contract that is currently in place were reviewed by the Council and discussion ensued concerning several aspects of the proposed purchase. The Council postponed further action on this until Thursday morning when Mr. Shabi and Mr. Darden will provide additional information and updates.

The Council went into scheduled executive session at 9:48 a.m. for the rest of the day.

The Council adjourned at 5:17 p.m.

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Council Reporter

Shawn Cortelyou