



# United Church of God *an International Association*

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Dear fellow elders and brethren,

Another year on the civil calendar is drawing to a close. For those of us who live in the Northern Hemisphere the days are shorter and colder. There are more hours of darkness than hours of light. Today is the day of the year with the shortest amount of daylight, known as the winter solstice. For those of you living in the Southern Hemisphere, you will be enjoying the day with the longest amount of daylight, the summer solstice.

These annual reoccurring events on the calendar are of little notice to most people, but in recent years there have been many books written about other heavenly signs or secret codes in an attempt to predict the fulfillment of end time events and the return of Jesus Christ.

Note God's warning through the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them'" (Jeremiah 10:2). The word dismayed means to be shattered, dismayed, or scared.

God's warning is just as true today. We should not follow the customs and practices of the world in which we now live, nor be shattered or scared over heavenly signs or secret codes. We are the "church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). We know the answers to the world's problems and offer the only real hope for mankind.

The apostle Paul wrote: "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6).

Every one of us must be watchful and sober-minded. This world is falling apart at a pace unlike any I have observed in my lifetime. Who would have ever thought we would be debating if there are more than two genders? Once mankind turned their back on the only source of real truth, they have been left to their own human reasoning, thus "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22).

Such is the state of the world today, but again God has called us out of darkness into light! We have the answers and God has blessed us with many resources. He expects us to be wise stewards in preaching the gospel and preparing a people. The mission of the Church is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples and care for those disciples.

So let me now share a few comments regarding the December meetings of the Council of Elders (Council) that concluded two weeks ago—because the work of the Council, its various committees and certainly the work at the home office, continues throughout the year.

The Strategic Planning and Finance Committee is continuing to work with the administration

to complete a unified Strategic Plan, Operation Plan and Budget that will be presented to the Council in their February 2023 meeting, and then on to the General Conference of Elders for ratification at the annual meeting in May. These three items put into motion how the United Church of God, *an International Association*, will allocate the resources God has provided through the tithes and offerings of all the faithful brethren.

The Doctrine Committee is continuing work on several projects. The largest is a more comprehensive update to the Hebrew Calendar study paper. The “Hebrew Calendar Summary” document is already approved and available online at [www.ucg.org/study-papers](http://www.ucg.org/study-papers). Other sections will be uploaded as they are completed and approved. The other paper regarding “Did the Father Forsake Jesus?” is still being reviewed and the Council determined that concepts within this paper needed to be separated into two different papers.

The Education Committee has three main projects: preparing a paper on the Sanctity of Marriage, preparing a survey of the ministry to determine continuing education needs, and a review of our current practices and customs for Sabbath services, for continuity.

During the meetings, the media department provided the Council an update on the progress made toward the massive overhaul of our current website, as well as other areas to preach the gospel using social media. The Church has a long history of moving to where the audience is located. We have moved from print only, to radio, television, cable and now Internet streaming and social media.

In spite of what is happening around us, we must never become discouraged and quit. We must have joy and hope for the future. We need to talk about it to our young people. Some have shared with me, in personal conversations, that they are discouraged. They listen to sermons and hear about the evils of this present age, but they too need to hear about vision and hope!

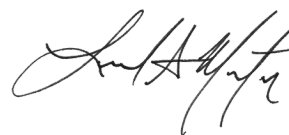
Next week more than 120 teenagers will be attending Winter Camp. The records I have indicate this is the largest attendance ever for Winter Camp, exceeding the previous high number by almost 30 percent. In addition, Mr. Shabi reports that more than 1,000 people will be in attendance at the Winter Family Weekend in Cincinnati, beginning on Friday. This gathering will exceed our largest single Feast of Tabernacles site and will include many families, teenagers, children and young adults. This might just be the largest such gathering of our young people and it is imperative that we teach them the hope of their future, regardless of what is happening in the world.

The Church today parallels what we read in Jeremiah. We are living in spiritual captivity, a “Babylon” of this world, but let’s not be discouraged, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Jesus prayed to the Father before he was crucified: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:15-16). Are we truly not of the world?

Let us all remain steadfast in our resolve to continue growing to be like our elder brother Jesus Christ. Please continue to pray for the Council and administration as we yield to God’s direction in the matters set before us.

In Christ’s Service,



Len Martin