



United Church of God *an International Association*

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Questions and Answers from the Council of Elders

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[Transcript of Video Recording by Darris McNeely]

Hello everyone, I'm Darris McNeely, one of the members of the Council of Elders. To openly communicate with you and to allow you to get to know members of the Council of Elders better, we plan to produce a number of these video updates with Council members over the coming months.

Today, on behalf of the entire Council of Elders, I'd like to update you on a number of issues before the United Church of God. I also will answer directly a number of questions that we on the Council have been asked in recent weeks. It's important for you to have firsthand access to what the Council is planning and what it is doing, so I thank you for joining me for this first presentation.

To begin, let me acknowledge that we on the Council are deeply aware of the stress and turmoil that exists in some quarters today. In fact, the issues leading up to the current situation have literally dominated much of our time and energy over the past year or so. We are deeply saddened and sorry that this long-time conflict among certain members of the ministry has now spread to the membership.

In acknowledging all of this, I will also say that we continue to work very diligently towards the end of this situation. We, like you, cry out to God and the living Head of this Church, Jesus Christ, for wisdom, for strength, for guidance, for humility. We are confident that God hears our prayers, and that He is using this trial as a means to refine us.

It has been a difficult time for us on the Council, as I'm sure it has for many of you. The good news is that God and Jesus Christ remain in control. They haven't changed. God is still all-powerful, and Jesus Christ is still Head of the Church. To resolve all of this and move forward, we must continue to change and align ourselves with God's will.

Now to your questions. Some have asked how the Council of Elders is handling this current crisis of ministerial resignations. To be sure, we have been spending even more time working directly with Dennis Luker and his administration to make sure that all of you will be taken care of.

This crisis did not have to happen. It happened because a number of former ministers made a choice not to accept the governing principles that the vast majority agreed to some 15 years ago.

Some say they accept our governance but still chose to break away. And now we are all dealing with the aftermath and planning for the future.

All members of the United Church of God will have Sabbath services to attend and worship God. We have many faithful elders who are stepping into the breach and supporting the Church. To those who have resigned, we say: “It doesn’t have to be this way. You know the way back. The door is open.”

In the next few weeks the administration will make a number of changes in ministerial assignments so everyone will have ready access to faithful elders. If for some reason you cannot attend services of the United Church of God, we invite you to use your computer to take part in a new Webcast from the Home Office here in Cincinnati. Simply go to members.ucg.org on the Internet and follow the instructions on how to access services here in Cincinnati.

Going on to another question, some have asked about the “irrevocable proof” of former ministers planning for a new organization. This proof was mentioned in a letter from us on the Council. Because of Human Resource and other issues, we don’t plan to directly publish the e-mails and other documentation that the Council received from a variety of sources. However, as we predicted in the earlier letter to you, much of that information has already made its way on to the Internet. It shows, if you care to research it, how former administrators and ministers were actively planning a new organization while still in the employment of United.

As the Word of God faithfully records in the 32nd chapter of Numbers , “be sure your sin will find you out” [verse 23]. And that has happened, while we were trying to work towards a solution.

As one solution, the Council even asked the treasurer the cost of bringing in all elders for the upcoming General Conference of Elders meeting this coming May.

This documentation that we on the Council have received shows that former ministers and administrators were secretly planning organizational meetings, structure and timing of their departure even as they spoke and wrote to Mr. Luker and others that they had never been a part of any such planning. It’s all very, very sad, as this documentation demonstrates the unethical conduct of former administrators and ministers in preparing to break away from the United Church of God.

Another question that still repeatedly comes up is the Sabbath situation in Chile and whether the Council is planning any secret doctrinal changes.

Please allow me to speak plainly: *the Council is most definitely not planning any doctrinal changes*. The Council does not have that power. The Council believes in and upholds the Statement of Beliefs of the United Church of God, including our traditional biblical teachings about the Sabbath day.

On another note, the Council is in agreement and in support of similar statements made several weeks ago by Mr. Luker, offering an apology to any and all who might have been confused about how this was initially handled. We on the Council sincerely hope that a spirit of

forgiveness can be extended to all regarding this issue, and that it can be laid to rest once and for all. There is a process to deal with issues like these, and it is active.

An additional question that has come up several times from members asks why the Council did not meet with any of the former administrators or ministers. Some have stated that such a meeting could have staved off the current situation.

The answer is that the Council did – over a period of months – have several meetings with now-former administrators and ministers. Those extensive meetings were well documented in an earlier letter to all of you. One of the challenges in the past was the unreasonable demand made by a number of individuals that the Council meet with people to discuss the same issues that had already been discussed at great length. How many times can you meet to discuss issues for which answers already exist?

The fact remains that we did meet. We did answer questions. We did try to work with now-former administrators time and time again. What happened is that the work of the Church became nearly paralyzed.

Now we are past that. We will move forward.

Continuing on with the questions we have received, some have noted that many former elders who resigned are claiming that they were forced out. Nothing could be further from the truth. Three ministers met with Dennis Luker to ask about a peaceful separation. His reply to them indicated that it would not be ethical to plan a new church organization while still employed by United.

None of our governing documents and nobody on the Council requires any minister to swear allegiance to any man. In fact, our system of governance more than allows for differences of opinion. That is expressed in the Proverb that states “in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” [Proverbs 11:14]. We believe that. We uphold that.

What we cannot tolerate as an organization and as a group of people claiming to uphold the laws of God is for people to stand up in services and create fear and uncertainty.

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We gave many, many warnings to now-former ministers that this type of unethical conduct would not be tolerated. Subjecting members to political agendas is not acceptable. Any organization outside of our Church would not tolerate employees or managers standing up and openly attacking the foundation of the organization. We on the Council remain puzzled why anyone would think that this type of unethical behavior was permissible.

No one is forced out. All we ask is that the principles of our Bylaws and our spiritual beliefs be upheld and sustained. That is a reasonable service.

Continuing, a number of people believe that there is fault on both sides of this situation—that both certain Council members and former administrators/Council members possess some responsibility for where we are today.

The key issue here is that open apologies have been extended by those remaining here within the United Church of God. You should know, or at least be reminded, of the fact that both Roy Holladay, then the interim president of the Church and the chairman of the Council, made an open apology to all at last May's General Conference of Elders. Victor Kubik, then the acting operational manager for Ministerial Services, made an open apology at the same GCE meeting. Several Council members have previously expressed the same.

Lest any be in doubt, speaking on behalf of the Council of Elders today, let me offer an apology to any and all who were and remain offended. As I stated earlier, we are but human. We strive to avoid error, but we can certainly make mistakes. As has also been stated in the past, we ask that a spirit of forgiveness be extended where offense – justified or not – has taken place.

Christ said that the world would know who we are as a Church by the open love we would have for one another. We certainly all have much room to grow in achieving this. With God's help, we will improve. We believe that as we yield to God – individually and collectively – He will heal our hurts and restore us. That remains our prayer for all.

Given the current situation, some have asked whether it is permissible to attend services of other organizations. We on the Council certainly don't endorse any breakaway organization, particularly ones led by former ministers who make false claims and who have tried to break us apart. As I noted earlier, a free Webcast of services from the Home Office here is now available to all on the Sabbath. Please take advantage of this offer if you don't have a regular service in your area.

Some former ministers and administrators are now calling for younger people associated with the United Church of God to leave and join their group. There is absolutely no reason for any young person to consider this. As this turmoil passes, we have every reason to believe that God will give growth to the Church.

There exist many opportunities for young people in the United Church of God. Our established youth programs will continue. The Ambassador Bible Center will continue. We have plans for extended programs for young people, including scholarships. If you have not yet noticed, watch the Beyond Today program and consider the fact that many young people are directly engaged in its production. To our young members your contributions are critically important, and represent the growing opportunities available to all within the United Church of God.

To our young people we ask you to stay with us. We want you. We need you. There are wonderful opportunities waiting for you in the United Church of God.

Finally, many wonder why God allowed this to happen and whether the United Church of God will in fact survive.

In answer, as stated before, there was and is no good reason why this division has to happen. We also know Romans 8:28, "all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." He puts everything to use for His purpose and plan, even the mistakes of men.

We also know that God allows a measure of self-will. He asks and requires us to seek and yield to His divine will. We know from the teachings and records in His divine Word that we must constantly be diligent, particularly within the Church, about a root of bitterness taking hold. When a root of bitterness and resentment does take hold, it is very difficult to remove. If not removed, it can destroy us. If you find yourself bitter or resentful, pray earnestly to God for healing. Set aside a period of fasting to seek Him.

The Bible teaches that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. It teaches, and we believe, that the living Christ leads this Church. We also read in the Bible that the Church has been subject to division and turmoil even beginning in the first century. As it reveals, real and lasting unity can only come when ministers and members alike have a gift of humility and gratitude and apply that gift. As the book of Romans points out, that gift is freely given by God when we yield our self-will to His divine and positive will. When that has happened, we have seen and will see great advances in the work of the Church.

We know from the Bible that a great work must take place. We know that God's will certainly will be accomplished. And we know that He will do that work, the work of preaching the Gospel and preparing a people for service in the coming Kingdom of God, among people who are responding to His call and direction, and those who have yielded themselves to Him and Jesus Christ in love.

The Church, this Church, will certainly survive. It will not only survive, it will grow in power as we yield ourselves to being transformed by God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

Going forward, we will renew our efforts toward reconciliation. We will renew our efforts in aligning ourselves with the revealed will of God. We will seek to grow in love and understanding, and the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We on the Council bear no ill will to anyone. We do not hate those who have begun to break away. We call upon them to reflect and consider what they are doing.

We are confident that Jesus Christ will eventually re-unite His Church. Our doctrines and teachings are true. They are attractive to those who are seeking the truth revealed in the Bible. Those teachings possess real power, the power of healing and transformation, the real and mighty power of love.

We will continue to preach the Gospel. Where possible, using every means available to us, we will expand on that mission of preaching the Kingdom of God to everyone on this planet.

We will continue to focus on preparing a people. We are re-instituting and strengthening our Christ-centered leadership and service programs. We will expand our programs to train new ministers and refresh experienced ones.

And according to God's will, we will renew our commitment to learning how to love one another.

This world desperately needs the truth that we possess. We have much to do. *And this we will do together as the United Church of God.*

Thank you for taking the time to listen to this. Thank you for being here. And thank you for your continued support, prayer and fasting.

Join with us now as we continue to seek the will of God and to yield to the leadership of our living Leader, Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the Council of Elders, thank you for yielding to God and blessings He provides for His called-out ones. Let us all go forward to the Kingdom!