

What Were the Real Efforts to Seek Reconciliation?

This letter precedes each of these documents: (1) *What Really Happened In Latin America?*, (2) *What Are the Real Issues?*, (3) *What Were the Real Efforts to Seek Reconciliation?* Please note that while this introductory letter is reproduced in all three documents, each document contains unique and important information.

December 13, 2010

To the brethren and ministry of the United Church of God,

Why more documents? And equally important, who authored them? Our Church of God culture and our personal convictions include a deep commitment to submission to authority, which includes upholding the office, even when the humanity of office holders shows through from time-to-time.

What possible circumstance could warrant the writing, publication and distribution of documents that frankly counter the official statements of the leadership of our church? It can only be a crisis of the greatest magnitude, summarized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.” Only in the most extreme of situations, such as that of Paul stepping away from the example of Christ, would those Christians served by him not follow his lead.

Christian wives who seek to live by Ephesians 5:22 (“...submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord”) sometimes face this most difficult of marital questions: Has my husband’s leadership become so toxic to me and/or to our children that I must step aside from what I know God would prefer that I normally do?

Over the past six months the current leadership has chosen to dismiss all meaningful efforts to seek reconciliation through face-to-face meetings within the ministry. In addition, the leadership has also chosen to go *public* with their communications. As of late June, the leadership began going directly to the lay membership of the church, making open accusations and declarations about the crisis at hand, and about those in the ministry who have sincere concerns. This has taken place in a number of member letters, documents of accusation, and in video sermons played in all congregations of the United Church of God. And, most recently the Council also released three documents to the membership attempting to justify concerns that 57 of us addressed in our open letter to the president on December 4, 2010.

As a result of these actions, we feel it is our responsibility, as ministers, to inform the membership of the church what is the truth about the core issues that have caused so much upheaval within the United Church of God over the past two years. This is not the best way to

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handle this type of conflict. And we realize that the membership should *never* have had to be brought into this discussion. Thus, we would be the first to admit that dealing with these issues should have been done in private, with the leadership and ministry discussing and striving to find understanding and truth in the matters. However, since all efforts to accomplish this in private over the past 18 months have proved fruitless, and since the administration and Council have gone public with their accusations and justifications, we believe our release of this information is needed and appropriate.

As to authors, this document was prepared by concerned ministers in the United Church of God who believe the truth should be made known. There are several authors, all of whom are pastors in the UCG. There was a broader team of many more ministers who contributed to and reviewed this document for accuracy—including those who have firsthand knowledge about the subjects addressed. The names of individuals are not important; it is the factual content of this document that is important. All authors have signed their names to the two letters of appeal so they are not hidden.

These issues are *not* about governance or the proposed move to Texas. The two core issues are (1) the abusive way brethren and elders have been treated, and (2) the sinful and unethical behavior of the church leadership. We ask you to look at the facts, and, in Christ's words, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" or, as the New Living Translation puts it, "Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly" (John 7:24).

Our desire is to speak the truth in love. It is the only way that true peace, unity and desired reconciliation can be accomplished.

Signed,

Your brothers in Christ, who authored, contributed to and reviewed the Open Letter to the President of December 4, 2010. (For the names, please see that document.)

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Introduction

The current Council stated in their December 9, 2010 letter to the membership that they have met with others in the ministry and “discussed the issues” on “six different occasions” over a period of “three years.” This seems unusual since those who should have been primary participants were not included. One meeting did take place in October 2009, but that meeting did not allow for all the issues to be discussed, as is explained below. The special meeting in October was precipitated by serious breaches of our documents and personal attacks on individuals who were members of the administration at that time.

The true concerns of the ministry are based on the actions of the current Council over the past 18 months and not the past three years as claimed in the most recent letter from the Council. It should be noted that since July of 2009—when then-president Clyde Kilough and Richard Thompson resigned from the Council for reasons of personal conscience—*no* meaningful, substantive or productive meetings have taken place in an effort at biblical reconciliation—the biblically-mandated action to talk privately, get the beam out of one’s eye first (Matthew 7:4-5) and seek reconciliation from a biblical perspective—which includes acknowledgment of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. All requests from ministers to meet with the administration and Council to discuss *all* of the real, core issues frankly and in that spirit have not resulted in any such meetings.

Comment on “the six occasions to seek reconciliation”

Below is a candid timeline on what actually took place during the six occasions cited by the December 9, 2010 document released by the Council claiming their efforts at reconciliation.

1) The first meeting cited in the December 9 Council document omits significant information. First, it refers to a meeting on November 9, 2009; the actual date of the meeting was November 12-13, 2008. This was an Ethics Committee retreat (which actually involved eight, not nine Council members—Bob Dick, Richard Pinelli, Aaron Dean, Roy Holladay, Darris McNeely, Robin Webber and Clyde Kilough), which resulted from the August, 2008 Council meeting. When the topic of the “alternate forum” was first raised at the August meeting, discussion eventually migrated to a larger theme. As the August 14, 2008 Council report states:

“As the discussion continued, the analysis that originated by the Council in 1996 was brought forward, which simply stated that one of the biggest historical problems in the Church is that we have not always treated each other in a godly manner. This statement concluded a discussion of ethics that took place during the Council meetings in Birmingham, Alabama, in April 1996.

“Mr. Kilough said that the ‘Birmingham statement’ needs to really become a spiritual mandate, and not just a statement. He asked that the Ethics Committee take the topic of trust and move on it as a spiritual issue that needs resolution in overall terms of our ability to relate with one another, both in organizational cultural terms and personally as Christians.

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“Mr. Dick noted that since committee work involves considerable brainstorming, that it would be good for the committee to have all materials and notes from the Birmingham conference and that the committee focus on how we can institutionally move forward on this.”

The Ethics Committee discussed many historical issues that had caused problems in the church, and ended by concluding that this really required full Council involvement rather than just committee recommendations. This was not a meeting focused on resolving “issues with involved parties” and seeking some type of reconciliation. The “alternate forum” issue had not come to a head as of yet, and, as mentioned above—many issues that have come to light in the past 18 months that were not known or discussed at all. Furthermore, several members of the current Council did not come on the scene until July 2009.

2) The May, 2009 Council retreat was convened to discuss elements of the alternate forum concerns. However, this only involved the Council at the time, and was prior to the “investigation” that the Council claimed to have conducted regarding that alternate forum in July of that same year. Even though “issues were discussed and explanations were accepted as satisfactory,” it should be noted that the manner in which that “investigation” was handled afterwards and communicated to the ministry was central to Mr. Kilough (then also president) and Mr. Thompson actually resigning from the Council! These resignations became a benchmark of concerns of ethics, honesty and legality of actions by this Council. No other members of the administration were even present for the retreat—which makes evident that it could hardly be an effort at reconciliation when the principal parties are not even involved. The 18 months that followed the July 2009 resignations have come to define the crucial period of time in which the administration (at that time) began to make sincere and serious efforts to resolve these matters in a biblical matter behind closed doors.

Historically, to understand fully what has happened one must go back to the summer of 2009. There were two consecutive Council meetings (in both May and August 2009) where documents were prepared, which illustrated a long list of Council violations of policies and procedures. These were presented before both meetings and requested to be placed on the agenda during executive session, because they were violations of the Council code of ethics. Both times they were denied being on the agenda. This is recorded in the minutes of the August 2009 meeting when Jim Franks and Doug Horchak made an attempt to have them placed on the agenda. The ballot was 10 to 2 against placing these violations on the agenda. The majority of the Council refused to allow these violations of our documents to be discussed in an official meeting, even though there was agreement that the documents had been breached.

3) The August 2009 Council meetings included Jim Franks and Doug Horchak who were newly seated as the result of the two resignations. While it is true that the Council did “discuss in great detail the conflict between the Council of Elders and members of the administration” (December 9, 2010 document about reconciliation), those meetings in fact revealed that the Council took HR-related actions and made accusations contrary to church policy, best practices and Scripture. No agreement was discussed or reached regarding the issues that arose. As a matter of fact, the unresolved issues of the August, 2009 Council meetings led Council members Doug Horchak and Jim Franks to produce a document that cited many of these infractions and wrong conduct by

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the Council. Additionally, on September 4, 2009, Mr. Horchak wrote to the chairman (Roy Holladay) and Roles and Rules Committee Chair (Bill Eddington) citing these violations and strongly requested a meeting. Quoting from this letter sent to Chairman Holladay:

“However, ultimately, my more critical desire is for us to address the *broader, core* concerns that continue to be in front of us as ministers in United Church of God. There are a number of issues, from *how we do business as a Council, if we operate according to our own policies, our willingness to investigate and adjudicate alleged ethical issues, our view of right/wrong and ethical definitions*, and frankly—even *our overall approach to governance*—that a number of us (on and off the Council of Elders) are very concerned about and clearly see quite differently.

“Those differences, being exacerbated by everything from rumor and accusation to ‘looking the other way,’ will only serve to continue to confuse, if not further divide our ministry and leadership in United Church of God if we are not willing to humbly and squarely deal with our differences. It would be a grave mistake to continue to deal with these differences simply by deferring to the ‘majority rule’ of who is in charge and has the authority on our current Council of Elders.”

Later in the letter, this central and core request was made of the chairman:

“We cannot continue to ignore what *must be done* if we are to have any hope at unity in the United Church of God. It is my advice and request that we desperately need to convene an emergency meeting of key council members and the President and his management team (apart from a council meeting) to discuss, assess, and consider the matters that divide us. At such a meeting, we must talk about the subjects that we clearly *see differently*, to measure our differences against the Word of God first, and our own policies and governing documents second and then all agree to allow the Scripture to be the final arbiter on establishing a framework for unity if we are to have any hope of truly moving forward.”

So, rather than the August, 2009 meetings ending with the Council having “reached agreement on ways to work together,” they resulted in concern and great disappointment for a few on the Council and for members of the administration.

4) The October 19-20, 2009 special meeting after the Feast of Tabernacles was based on the aforementioned request (citing the list of concerns) put forth by Mr. Horchak and Mr. Franks. However, the request made in the September 4, 2009 letter to the chairman, asking for *all* members of the administration to meet and talk openly with the Council was not honored. Just prior to the meetings (to which Chairman Holladay agreed to and planned) the chairman re-defined how the meetings would be handled and stated that:

- The meeting would only include the president.
- It would only include other operation managers when the topic under discussion “pertained to them.”

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- It would be limited to the HR-related issues between the Council and the president.
- It was not allowed to be in *executive session*, but in “closed session,” meaning the secretary would be excluded and no notes would be taken, which left no official documentation of the details of the meeting. (There are two levels of documenting Council meetings; a public report of open sessions is written by the Council reporter and distributed to the membership of the church. In addition, official minutes are made of all sessions, open and executive by the Council Secretary. The single exception is the above described “closed session” of which no record is made.)

Mr. Horchak and Mr. Franks objected to the manner proposed for conducting the meeting on Monday, October 19, but to no avail. They did so in open session so that it would be recorded by the secretary. Unfortunately only a few of the topics of great concern were even addressed in the two days.

While many of the HR-related actions of the Council toward the president and his staff were discussed at these meetings, only the president was present at all of the meetings. Contrary to the request made in the September 4 letter asking for *all* members of the administration to meet and talk openly with the Council about a number of issues, these meetings were limited to HR actions of the Council and not the core issues that the administration strongly desired to spend time discussing and resolving. The HR issues stemmed from numerous false accusations against three operation managers and one staff member, but three of these four were excluded from being able to attend, face their accusers and defend themselves. Because he was a Council member only Mr. Franks was allowed in all of the meeting (except for a brief time that Larry Salyer was called in to verify some information). The criticisms and accusations of the Council about these men took much of the focus in these two days.

5) It is true that during the December 2009 Council meetings hours of executive session were spent on certain topics, but never were these topics addressed with the involvement and participation of all members of the administration—and certainly not with the focus of seeking true reconciliation, repentance and change. And, it should be noted that during the December 2009 Council meetings, an effort was made by certain members of the Council to terminate a high level employee without the full knowledge of the entire Council. The official Council of Elders Report shows another attempt to address concerns that was denied: “Doug Horchak moved and Jim Franks seconded to have four items added to the agenda: 1) discussion regarding alleged Bylaws violations in Council business; 2) discussion of alternate forum; 3) HR assessment of the president; and 4) questions/concerns requested from regional pastors. The motion was not approved” (December 7, 2009). If anything, the actions of the Council in December increased the deteriorating trust between some on the Council of Elders and members of the UCG administration.

6) During the February, 2010 Council meetings, a formal apology was given from the Council to the president for mistakes made in the matters discussed in October. While a personal apology (not from the entire Council) was offered to one operation manager for mistakes made in how he was dealt with in previous months, he was the only one to whom such overtures were made. But the core issues continued to grow and remained unaddressed. As a matter of fact, the February

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meetings happened to take place over two weeks after 11 ministers (the president, members of his administration and three current or former Council members) wrote a sincere letter to reach out to the Council to communicate and deal with the growing issues that were facing the ministry and church at that time. The following paragraph from this four-page letter demonstrates the sincerity of the 11 authors in attempting to have the Council address the broad issues that would affect our future as a church:

“We are not just referring to isolated issues such as bloc voting, the alternate forum, etc., but fundamental issues of principle—how we go about dealing with one another and our responsibilities in the Church of God. Our goal is unity. Our desire is peace. Our hope is for healthy relationships, renewed respect. We have no heart or intent for division. We have a heart for sitting at the table and working as long as it takes, as hard as it may be, until we can all agree on the spiritual principles that undergird our relationships and commit to restoration and healing” (February 4, 2010).

The Council offered no response to this letter for the entire two-and-a-half weeks leading up to the regularly-scheduled February meetings. There was no substantive response to this sincere request during the meeting itself. In fact, after six weeks passed without a response from the Council, the 11 wrote another letter of inquiry. The Council replied this time, stating that all issues had been discussed “in whole, in part, or in principle,” and the 11 were told to stop “haranguing” them. After replying and expressing their disappointment at this answer, the 11 dropped further requests.

NOTE: Concerning the claim that our problems stem from some wanting to change our governance or being disgruntled over the rescinded move to Texas, *none* of the issues raised in the concerns from the 11 dealt with those matters! They dealt *entirely with ethical matters* of spiritual importance!

This is an accurate description of the six occasions the Council claims it gave its due diligence to respond to the administration of the church to “seek reconciliation.”

Actual efforts to meet and seek biblical reconciliation

Comments by the current president or others about the “desire to talk” do not reflect the reality of what has ultimately transpired since July of 2009. Below is an accurate accounting since then of the requests to talk by the administration, the Regional Pastors and others, as well as the result of those efforts:

- As cited above, on September 4, 2009, a request to the chairman for a meeting of the full Council and entire administration team was denied, with no reason given. This resulted in only a “closed meeting” of the Council and president in October 2009. The entire administration team was not included, although they were directly involved in “broader, core concerns that continue to confront us.” The administrative team viewed this as a squandered opportunity to engage the key parties, and never has been able to understand why they were denied attendance at this meeting.

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- In November of 2009, Chairman Roy Holladay and Council member Victor Kubik attended the annual Regional Pastors' meetings. This was a regularly scheduled meeting, but with Mr. Holladay and Mr. Kubik in attendance, the normal agenda was changed to accommodate a full morning of questions and discussion. At the meetings, all 10 of the Regional Pastors asked the chairman to address their questions, issues and concerns, which reflected those of many members in their regions, to which Chairman Holladay agreed, asking the Regional Pastors to submit their concerns to the Council in writing. These questions were quickly submitted, but the RPs never received any form of response, even when they later specifically requested a response before the December, 2009 Council meetings.
- Beginning with the February 4, 2010 letter cited above, three separate letters were sent from 11 former and current senior administrators and (then active) Council members (hereafter referred to as "the Group of 11") to the Council between February and April of 2010, requesting to talk with the entire group about issues of serious concern regarding double-standards, misrepresentations and policy violations.

While the Council claims to have sought talking and reconciliation, this was not just a one-way effort. Following is yet another quote from the first letter, showing the context of the request and the sincerity of the Group of 11:

"The two attached documents express how we feel about what we have seen developing. We pondered long and hard whether or not, and how, and when, to send these documents. If we are wrong in any of these matters then please show us—we want to know. But where we are right, then please work with us to resolve these problems.

"We are not the first to write to you about our concerns. Others have respectfully written letters that expressed their deep concern for the future of United. To date, these letters seem to have been largely ignored by the Council as a whole, even though the volume of these communications has been unprecedented since the difficulties we faced in 1998 when David Hulme left. For example:

- Bryan and Rhonda Waddle wrote multiple letters and the lack of response finally prompted them to go to the GCE.
- Eleven elders, including two pastors, in the Minneapolis area, wrote but received no Council response other than two individuals making some personal phone calls.
- Various members have written letters, some respectful and some very angry, but they, too, have received no response other than individual Council members replying on their own volition.
- David Pavlik, an elder in the Akron area, wrote a heartfelt letter, but received no Council response, only a few individual replies.

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- Neil Becker, an elder from South Africa, wrote an equally heartfelt letter, but also received no Council response.

“It is our feeling that there will be more letters and communications unless something is done to repair the problem. Dozens of other elders and pastors are equally frustrated, but wonder what good it will do to write when they know so many have been ignored. We hope that the Council will stop for a moment and consider the impact ignoring these letters has on the members and ministers alike, and we hope our letter will not be similarly ignored.

“We are writing out of concern and not for any private agenda. Please set aside any suspicions of a ‘split.’ We are not planning to go anywhere, nor are the ministers going anywhere. They have invested as much time and energy as we all have in the United Church of God and they want to do what they can to improve the situation.”

While in the end an offer was made to meet with just a few members of each group, the Group of 11 requested that all of them be present—no more excluding people from discussions. However, the Council of Elders held no meetings with the Group of 11, dismissed all concerns and told the 11 to stop asking for meetings. In total there have been dozens of letters written to the Council from groups and individuals pleading for such a high level meeting to resolve the problems that were growing worse. It should be noted that just days following the final request from the Group of 11, the president and one operation manager were removed from their responsibilities, and another operation manager immediately resigned.

- February-April, 2010: A letter of concern (LOC) was sent to the Council from 54 elders/pastors on February 23, 2010, which also appealed to the Council to address several ethical issues. The Council responded to this request on February 25th, offering to have a few Council members sit down with five LOC signers. On March 4th, the LOC elders (then expanded to 60) asked that the COE first address the requests and the concerns submitted by the Regional Pastors, the 11 Minneapolis elders, and from the above mentioned Group of 11. The LOC also requested these concerns be addressed in a timely manner, before the GCE in early May. Eventually, on July 10, 2010, Victor Kubik (then acting Ministerial Services Manager) met with the Minnesota elders and discussed a few concerns. The Council chose not to respond in any form to the other requests to resolve the principal concerns. Besides these group letters, dozens of personal messages of appeal and/or concern were sent by members and elders to the Council in 2009 and 2010, none of which resulted in the Council dealing with the matters brought to them.
- In July Mr. Luker asked Mr. Kilough and Mr. Franks to come to the home office to meet with him and Mr. Kubik. At Mr. Luker’s request they went through much of the history of the problems and Mr. Luker reached the conclusion—without being prompted in any way—that there really needed to be discussions between the Council. He made it clear that he wanted to see some talks take place and he said he would propose to the Council that they meet with the former administrators at the August Council of Elders’ meetings. All agreed to do that, if the Council was willing. The next day Mr. Kilough gave Mr. Luker a notebook with all of the communications between the Group of 11 and the Council. He promised to read it completely.

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What Mr. Luker proposed and how he characterized the meeting in his office is unknown, but shortly thereafter the Council replied to Mr. Kilough and Mr. Franks with a four-page letter that illustrated the Council clearly did not understand the issues that bothered the administrators. The Group of 11 sent the Council a four-page reply correcting the misstatements, assumptions and false accusations, but the communication ended there and the matter was dropped.

- Feast of Tabernacles 2010: Mr. Kilough talked with Mr. Luker during the Feast of Tabernacles in Daytona Beach about this, and asked how Mr. Luker felt about the Council rejecting Mr. Luker's request. Mr. Kilough reminded him, "...this was your request for a meeting, not ours." Mr. Luker said he was really disappointed and that he was going to go back to them yet again with a request to meet with the Group of 11. Mr. Kilough said he was willing to meet with the Council and administration, but not by himself or in a small group—that it was time for the Council to talk with the entire group. Mr. Kilough also told Mr. Luker that, given the state of things then, after the Council talked with the Group of 11, they needed to address the full GCE, because there were now many more ministers who had serious concerns. There were other pastors in Daytona who told Mr. Luker the same thing: that it was time to convene a meeting with the GCE. In a meeting with Mr. Franks and Mr. Kilough on November 15, Mr. Luker said he had talked with the Council members. The Council's response to Mr. Luker was that it saw no need for a meeting; that in the Council's judgment, the problem was that the Group of 11 has always been unreasonable and unwilling to cooperate unless they got their way. That is not the language of seeking reconciliation.
- October-December 2010: In spite of continual requests from multiple groups and individuals, the Council has steadfastly refused to have a meeting to deal with the main issues. To this date, no meeting has taken place as a result of the requests that have been made over the past 18 months (May 2009-December 2010) with the exception of the October 19-20 meeting where the chairman refused to allow several in the administration to participate.

Finally, on December 4, 2010 another letter was sent to the president from 56 employed elders and one retiree outlining the problematic issues that face us and requesting whether these issues are considered to be irreconcilable. Subsequently, the letter has been made available to all elders and many more have added their signatures of endorsement. Mr. Luker replied in an open letter to all the elders of the church on December 13, 2010. He identified his view of the problems as: "Let's face facts: the ongoing struggle within the United Church of God over the past months and years has been about power and control. It's been about not having the humility and faith to accept our duly elected and appointed governing authorities. ... With all my heart I sincerely hope and pray that you will rethink and re-pray your position and truly unite with us. But if not, then we are at an impasse."

Summary

Since August of 2009, there has been only one meeting scheduled to address the issues, which did not include all parties involved. Unfortunately that one meeting (October 2009) did not discuss some of the major issues and, more importantly it did not include people who were directly involved in those issues.

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Based upon the incontrovertible evidence above, there clearly were not “six meetings to seek reconciliation.” There have not been any substantive meetings to work through the real issues as of this writing, mid-December 2010. The Group of 11 has additional (as yet unreleased) documentation that would provide a powerful witness about the issues that were raised (and the issues that were not), as well as about the attitude in which the group came to the Council asking for conciliatory discussions.

The specific matters contained in this summary clarify the actual efforts that have been made to talk and sincerely seek biblical reconciliation. We understand that reconciliation from a godly perspective requires the parties to talk and listen. It calls for all involved to be willing (in attitude and action) to get the beam out of their own eye first (Matthew 7:5). And, it demands that the issues be defined clearly and understood in light of the Word of God; that all parties be willing to have their actions judged against the Scripture and repent as needed. Only then can forgiveness be realized and have the possibility of moving forward with the hope of peace and the blessings of God. Unfortunately, there was never any agreement to this type of meeting or process.

It has been the desire of those involved in making these requests to sit down in a godly manner to discuss the issues that have come to divide the church. The issues *have nothing to do with the move to Texas or a problem with the governance structure of United*. The problems are about a continual pattern of unethical behavior, as well as abusive treatment of ministers and members. Without a genuine and thorough attempt to discuss the real issues, the problems and divisions have only grown deeper.