

OFFICE of the BISHOP

Ron Ramsey • Bishop, US National Conference

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary they have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-4, NIV).

Introduction

This is my last report to my church. I want to begin by stating how much I have appreciated your prayer and support as we have navigated some difficult waters. While this position was not something I sought or desired, I am glad to have been able to serve the Lord and this church in this capacity.

I have attempted to bring several driving values to our church during the past three years.

- That the headquarters is to be a support to the local church.
- That our churches need to become obedient to the Great Commission.
- That the Lord of the Church desires that his churches be healthy.
- That the Great Commission is a continuum along which individuals travel on a journey of becoming a Christ follower and grow to become a devoted follower.
- That our churches need to have a healthy balance between outward focus and inward focus, but preference must always be given to outward.
- That the management systems of our churches need to be able to support growth.

Paul says, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul also tells us that the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world (see 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). These weapons are given to us in Ephesians 6:14. They are truth, righteousness, eagerness to preach, faith, a personal knowledge of salvation, and the Word of God when it is spoken—all, I believe, centered around a strong prayer life.

I suppose most of us know that, but it just seems so difficult for individuals and churches to get their mind around what this means in the practical working out of our faith. As a result, we use the weapons of the world in trying to do a spiritual work, and they just don't fit. They are not effective.

Our churches and pastors are generally not lazy. They are very busy. They work hard. When I look at church bulletins, I sometimes feel tired. So much activity and effort. Yet there seems to be little evaluation as to the success of the activity when measured against the church's true mission. We have replaced a biblical model with the model of the world.

It is time for our churches to check what type of weapons they use in their fight against the power of darkness. When the biblical model of disciple-making is used with worldly methods, it will never produce a lasting spiritual fruit. Instead, it produces the fruit of power, control and greed, and the church languishes in carnal control.

Dealing with conflict in many of our churches over power issues, control issues, and greed issues has been tiring and disappointing. Thank God for those places that have as their mission and vision to honor Christ by faithfully making disciples. They are few and far between, but to those who have taken the Great Commission seriously, I simply say: Praise God!

General Observations

This denomination underwent a radical change in 2005 in the way we organize ourselves. The move away from the annual conference and to a cluster system has gone rather well. A few places still desire the annual conference days. But as pastors and churches become more familiar with the cluster system, there is less desire to go back.

The cluster leaders deserve a great word of praise. Most of them stepped up big-time to

become the “boots on the ground” to resolve conflicts, station pastors, and keep us together as a denomination focused around a value of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Probably the main reason that I like the current system is that the bishop is able to present a central theme and direction to the denomination. In the past, each annual conference functioned per Discipline, but each with its own local spin. Thus, we did not have one central, clarifying theme across the denomination. The bishop now has the opportunity to develop such a theme.

As I began my tenure as bishop, I developed a Purpose/Mission Statement, which was:

“The purpose of the denominational office is to be a national resource center to the pastors and church leadership, enabling them to lead their congregations to health and growth, thus fulfilling the Great Commission.”

A new vision statement was also developed:
“To see the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, become a mighty movement of evangelism, discipleship, and leadership by equipping our local churches to be effectively engaged in the Harvest.”

The Purpose/Mission and Vision gave birth to five Strategic Initiatives for 2005 – 2009:

1. Implement and encourage an atmosphere where multiplication of churches will be considered normal.
2. Encourage spiritual formation and renewal within the churches of the United Brethren in Christ.
3. Actively equip churches and pastors for effective ministries.
4. Develop a plan to identify and retain those who are being called into fulltime Christian Service.
5. Discover, evaluate, and articulate the perceived brand image of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, and make necessary changes to a preferred brand image.

How have we done?

Church Multiplication

We have one new church plant during the past three years: Imagine This LLC in Grand Ledge, Mich. This church plant had a good beginning and continues to do well.

However, this is an initiative that we have not done well. We have not added new churches to replace the ones that closed or withdrew. This will remain a problem and will become a crisis unless we can plant more churches than we

close or lose.

The church planting material that I have read suggests that a denomination should plant at least 3% of their total churches each year. For us that would be 5 – 6 new churches in the next year.

The most effective way to plant new churches is for established churches to birth new churches. Individual churches could do that or cooperate with a LEAD Team in their area to begin new churches. Church planting has not been a consistent part of our vocabulary.

If we are going to continue as a denomination, we must begin an aggressive plan of church multiplication.

Church Renewal and Equipping for Effective Ministry

I believe that we have begun turn-around in about 7% of our churches. In some it is going better than in others. But we have seen some significant change in attitudes of pastors and congregations.

This has been due in large part to the work of Pat Jones, Director of Healthy Church Ministries, through the consultation process. Not only did we do an assessment in a number of churches, but Pat personally coached each church and pastor for a period of 12 months.

We have used the church consultation as the primary method to equip our churches for effective ministry. We held consultations in churches that made a request for such a service. This was done without any charge to the local church. Where there was good follow through with the congregation and pastor, there has been fruit.

Develop a plan to identify and retain those who are being called into fulltime Christian Service.

For the most part, this has not been done.

Branding

We have rebranded the denominational office into Healthy Ministry Resources. We did not change the name of the denomination, nor would we even want to. The main reason that we developed a new brand was to project the idea that the denominational office exists as a service to the churches. Legally, we are still Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, but have a DBA of Healthy Ministry Resources.

I am pleased but not satisfied with what we have done these past four years. Far too many

of our churches remain unhealthy. Some will not make it and will close their doors. Some will continue struggling to make ends meet using very part-time pastors.

The 2007 stats show that about 80% of our churches are below the 150 mark in AM worship. That is just about the cut-off for churches that can afford a fulltime pastor. But I believe some will catch the vision. Some churches are dissatisfied with where they are as a congregation and will make the turn-around.

But that in and of itself, although good, will not be enough. We must find a way to begin an aggressive plan of church multiplication while at the same time seeing many of our current churches work to become healthy. If we fail at this, the denomination will ultimately fail. We cannot continue losing churches every year without replacing those through church multiplication.

National Conference 2009

The 2009 conference is scheduled for June 4-7 at Sawmill Creek Resort, Huron, Ohio. Our theme is XLR8. The speaker for Thursday and Friday evening will be Pastor Tim Brown, who pastors First Baptist Church of Clovis, Calif. Both he and his wife, Charity, will share in seminars on Saturday as well.

The business will be conducted on Friday morning and afternoon. Saturday night will be devoted to missions with our Global Ministries in charge. This night will prove to be a great blessing.

Sunday will close with commissioning the new bishop.

Camp Michindoh

The Michindoh Camp and Conference Center in Hillsdale, Mich., was transferred to the National Conference in 2007. In 2008, ownership was transferred to Lenawee Christian Ministries of Adrian, Mich. At that point, Camp Michindoh was no longer under any UB authority. Lenawee Christian Ministries, in turn, has now gifted the camp to Spring Arbor College in Spring Arbor, Mich.

For details, consult pages 4-15 of Report 21, the minutes of the Executive Leadership Team.

Referendum Results

Votes returned as of April 14, 2009:

	Yes	No
Referendum 1:	4533	215
Referendum 2:	4493	206

See USNationalConference .com for referendum details.

Pastors Appointed since June 2007

June 2007. Dan Drake, supply, Olive Branch (Lakeville, Ind.).

June 2007. Todd Lilley, Mt. Olivet (Mt. Solon, Va.).

Nov. 2007. Gary Dilley, College Park (Huntington, Ind.).

Dec. 2007. Floyd West, supply, Center Hill (Mt. Carroll, Ill.).

May 2008. Marvin Schwartz, New Horizons (Rockford, Ohio).

May 2008. Greg Helman, Blue Rock (Waynesboro, Pa.).

May 2008. Micheal E. Dean, Sabetha (Sabetha, Kans.).

July 2008. Bradley Kittle, Faith Community/The Rock (Findlay, Ohio).

July 2008. Josh Kesler, Good Shepherd Church (Huntington, Ind.).

Nov. 2008. Dan Drake, Olive Branch (Lakeville, Ind.).

Jan. 2009. Barry Skinner, interim, Kilburn Ave. (Rockford, Ill.).

March 2009. Michael Soltis, Mt. Zion (Wayne, Ohio).

June 2009. Ron Evans, Kunkle UB (Kunkle, Ohio).

Churches that have withdrawn or closed since National Conference 2007:

Pennfield UB Church (Battle Creek, Mich.). The church closed April 8, 2008, the property was sold, and money was given to church multiplication.

Prince of Peace (Springfield, Ohio). Closed May 8, 2008.

South Mountain (Dillsburg, Pa.). Withdrew September 28, 2008, to join an Assemblies of God church plant.

Living Hope (State Line, Pa.). Closed October 5, 2008, and merged with Crossroads Brethren in Christ.

Ellport (Ellwood City, Pa.). Withdrew.

Warrendale (Detroit, Mich.). Withdrew March 31, 2009, to join a Bible Church.

United Brethren of New York (Chinatown, New York). Withdrew April 1, 2009.

Lake Brantley (Lake Brantley, Fla.). Withdrew.

Solomon's Chapel (Riverton, W. Va.). Closed.

Center Hill (Mount Carroll, Ill. Closing June 14, 2009.

Name Changes

Ithaca to Lifehouse Ministries (Ithaca, Mich.)
Highland Avenue to New Life Church (Chanute, Kansas).

Gethsemane to Pathway Community (Jackson, Mich.).

Findlay Faith to The ROCK (merged with EC congregation, Findlay, Ohio).

Central to New Beginnings (Montpelier, Ohio).

Nomination Ballot for National Conference

Bishop: Phil Whipple, senior pastor, Colwood UB (Caro, Mich.)

ELT:

East District Clergy: Greg Helman, Daryl Elliott, John Beukema, Linton Thomas.

East District Laypersons: Annette Sites, Don Burkholder, Sharon Nottage.

West District Clergy: Greg Reed, Dan Young, Dennis Miller.

West District Laypersons: Molly Kesler, Dave Walker.

North District Clergy: Darrel Bosworth, Les Smith, Dave Burkett.

North District Laypersons: Mike Holcomb, Dan Paternoster, Duane Herlein.

Central District Clergy: Marty Pennington, Joe Leighton.

Central District Laypersons: Tim Krugh, Debbie Voight.

Physical Property

The old United Brethren Publishing Establishment building, located on Franklin Street in downtown Huntington, had as a building feature a stained glass window in an arch form built over the main entrance. In the glass were the words “Publishing Establishment of the United Brethren in Christ.”

When we sold the building and moved to our current building in 1976, that window was left above the door of the old building. With Marci Hammel’s help we were able to get that stain glass window just for the cost of removing it and replacing it with a new, regular window.

The window was in a poor condition from the weather, and there were several holes in the glass. We had it restored and mounted in a back-lit wall unit, which now stands in the lobby of our current offices (302 Lake St., Huntington). This window is a part of our UB history and heritage. It feels nice to have it home. You can see the display in a post on the Bishop Blog (Bishopblog.org) or stopping by our office

in Huntington.

Speaking of UB history and heritage....

Some years ago the pictures of our UB Bishops were hung on one side of the main hallway of our current building. But they only began with Bishop Milton Wright. Pat Jones and I discussed from time to time that our bishops really began with Otterbein and Boehm. Administrative Assistant Cathy Reich, in cooperation with Randy Neuman at the UB Historical Society, worked together to correct that.

Now, both sides of the hallway feature pictures of our bishops going all the way back to Otterbein—bishops from 1800-1889 on one side, bishops from 1889-present on the other. We are missing the photos of two bishops, but images have been recently discovered, and soon, they will be added to complete the Hallway of Bishops. Thanks, Randy and Cathy, for all your help on this project.

Huntington University

I appointed Dalton Jenkins to the Higher Education Leadership Team, fulfilling the vacancy caused by Dirk Small’s resignation.

Pat Jones and I have been involved in the interview process of candidates for the Graduate School Director’s position. I am pleased to announce that Mike Cook will be appointed to this position, coming to us from Taylor University—Fort Wayne. We are excited about his gifts and abilities and how they will affect this program.

Conclusion

I would like to express my thanks to all the staff at the national office who work so tirelessly and unselfishly for the good of our church and the Kingdom and are often overlooked. They include Cathy Reich, Darlene Burkett, Mabel Mundy, Marilyn Waters, who work fulltime; and Jane Seely and Allison Dunten, who work part-time.

The management team has also been terrific to work with. The emphasis here is on “team,” for it has been truly a team effort. Pat Jones has been tireless in his work for this church. Jeff Bleijerveld has added a dimension that has been amazing in Global Ministries. Donna Holopeter has taken on additional roles in Global Ministries, plus she served as the acting director for several months before Jeff was hired to be the director. Steve Dennie has so effectively communicated with the church at large, and provides advice to us in all thing Apple/Mac.

Marci Hammel has directed our finances.

Beyond our building, Blair Dowden has given tireless devotion and guidance to Huntington University, and Tom Blaylock has given excellent leadership to our church multiplication efforts.

To all I give you my heartfelt thanks for all your hard work and for making this a pleasant place to work.

To the churches and pastors: thank you for allowing me to serve you in this office. Every day as I begin my tasks, I am humbled by the responsibility you have placed upon me. I have made mistakes along the way. Not everyone was happy all the time. But I give all the praise to

God for His power and strength each day.

A special thanks goes to my wife. EJ has been my traveling companion, my prayer warrior, and my support throughout our lives together, but especially during the past four years. I thank God every day for bringing her into my life. She has been a valued partner in ministry. Thanks EJ, I couldn't have done it without your love and support.

Thank you for the confidence you have placed in me. God bless.

*Respectfully submitted,
Ronald R. Ramsey,
US Bishop*

REPORT 11-5

Office of the
Bishop