

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
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December 8, 2016

Dear Brethren,

For the past month we have been holding meetings here at the office. First were the meetings for our youth camp directors, followed by meetings for our Feast coordinators last week and the Ministerial Board of Directors (MBOD) this week. It was very encouraging to see the impact each of these groups is having on the overall work of the Church and our plans for next year.

The report from the camp directors was extremely encouraging. From our Festival registration system, we know that almost 1,200 of our U.S. attendees are under the age of 20, falling into the “youth” category. That is 23 percent of our total U.S. attendance! Sometimes we have the impression that we are an “old Church.” Of course, that may be true in some congregations, but when you view the big picture, we actually have a healthy mix of older members, middle-aged members and younger members.

The Feast meetings were equally encouraging. For 2017 we are planning eight sites plus two satellite sites, for a total of 10 in the U.S. Most of these locations were used as Festival sites in 2016, but there will be a couple of new ones this next year. The final list will be announced in advance of Festival registration next spring.

The Ministerial Board of Directors’ meetings took place at the office Dec. 5-7. This is the annual meeting of the board and an event that everyone here in the office looks forward to. As you know, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, has both an administration and a corporate board. The board is composed of seven men, all elders with at least 20 years of ministerial experience. The members of the current board are David Baker, Arnold Hampton, Joel Meeker (chairman), Richard Pinelli, Larry Salyer, Richard Thompson and Leon Walker. The board works directly with the administration in providing oversight for the organization. The administration of the Church includes the president, the operation manager for Media, the operation manager for Ministerial Services, the treasurer and an international liaison who serves areas outside the U.S.

During their annual meeting, the Ministerial Board of Directors reviews the strategic plan, the operation plans and the proposed budget for 2017. The administration is tasked with producing these documents, and the MBOD is tasked with approving them.

Our strategic plan for 2017 is built around several key issues that are very important to the mission of the Church. Included among them are the following:

- Facility development. As I mentioned in my November letter, we have extended our lease here in Allen, Texas, through May of 2018 even though we have outgrown our space. We are currently spending more than \$150,000 per year to lease 8,144 square feet of office and classroom space. The MBOD has agreed that our best course of action is to locate land in this general area (the cities of Allen, Plano and McKinney) and build our own facility with

20,000 to 25,000 square feet of space. During this year's MBOD meetings, a resolution was passed authorizing the administration to locate and purchase land for the construction of such a building in 2017.

- Media expansion. Our mission is to preach the gospel to the world and care for those whom God may call. In 2016 we averaged more than 900,000 unique visitors each month to our primary website (Life, Hope & Truth) with a return rate each month of approximately 250,000. This was very encouraging, but we plan to invest more money and energy into our websites in 2017, including our French and Spanish sites.
- Leadership development. Ministerial Services is working hard at developing leaders for the future of the Church. We know that we will need to replace pastors who will be retiring over the next decade. With that need in mind, a new leadership development program was unveiled just prior to the Feast and will be fully implemented in 2017.
- Foundation Institute. A formal program for teaching the Bible is very important for the long-term stability and development of the Church. In five years just under 100 people have attended the program here in Allen. We believe this is sowing seeds for the future development and growth of the Church.
- FI Online. Since not everyone can take a year off to attend classes here in Allen, it is important for us to continue making Bible classes available through FI Online.

On the first day of the MBOD meetings I presented a report titled "State of the Church." My report included the following statistical information:

- Our cash reserves are now equal to more than 10 weeks of income. This has been our goal since we began and represents our commitment to being good stewards of the resources that God provides.
- Our annual budgeted income has increased each year since we began and is projected to show an increase of 4 percent for 2016. Since 2011, our annual budgeted income has grown by 56 percent.
- This year's holy day offerings were higher than last year by approximately 3 percent.
- Our 2016 Festival attendance was higher than any previous year and was 750 more than our attendance in 2011.
- The percentage of our income provided by nonmember donations increased from 10 percent in 2015 to 13 percent in 2016.
- The number of personal correspondence letters/emails answered this year showed an increase of more than 50 percent over 2015.
- We set a record for new subscribers to the print version of *Discern* magazine when in a single month, November 2016, we added 815 subscribers.

All of this is really good news. But what does it all mean? Do statistics tell the true story of the Church of God? Let me share an email with you that Mr. Horchak and I received just prior to the Feast coordinators' meetings. It was written by one of our 2016 Feast coordinators.

I wanted to pass on a personal observation from this year. Everything went extremely well, and the attitude of the brethren was exemplary. ... I feel this demonstrated that members are moving towards a level of spiritual maturity we haven't had in the past, one that Christ both desires and requires of us. Perhaps we are being prepared for both the hard times of the "last days" as well as birth into

the family of God. I was personally very encouraged by what seemed so evident in the growth of COGWA members.

When you stop and think about it, the spiritual growth of the Church is more important than any of the statistics about finances, magazines, etc. Many of us remember the days of the Worldwide Church of God when there were 150,000 people at the Feast of Tabernacles and plenty of positive statistics to share. But where are those people today? It is certainly not my intent to pass judgment on anyone, but the facts show that many have departed from the faith since those days.

Sometimes we can lose sight of what is most important. We could print hundreds of thousands of magazines and still drift away from the truth. Spiritual growth cannot be measured by statistics alone—such growth is much more difficult to recognize. Prior to Christ's return, the Church will need to make "herself ready," which will require spiritual development and growth.

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:7-8).

I agree with the Feast coordinator who commented about our being prepared for hard times ahead as well as our future birth into God's family. I believe we all know that such preparation will involve trials and hard times.

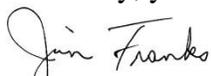
"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Trials and tragedies will occur among God's people. Experience teaches that there is no way to know when or from where trials will come. How we react to difficult times is an important part of our spiritual development. Statistics are great, and I believe they show that much has been accomplished in a short period of time, but if we are not growing spiritually week by week and year by year, one must ask, what do the numbers really mean for us?

I was excited to present my "state of the Church" report to the MBOD this year. The statistics are very encouraging, but I hope we don't look at the statistics (income, attendance, magazines, etc.) alone as evidence of success and lose sight of what real success is—becoming better Christians who worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). If we aren't growing individually and collectively, then something is missing.

I hope that everyone is excited about the work being done, but I also pray that, as a body, we are becoming better Christians every day, striving first and foremost to be pleasing to God.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks