

# CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Dear Brethren,

Each month when I sit down to write a member letter, I struggle with exactly what to write about. There is so much happening in the world and in the Church that it is quite difficult to focus on one simple message. Some months I may be more successful than others, but I always want to make my letters helpful, informative and encouraging and provide some good news in the midst of all the world's bad news that we hear every day. In this letter I want to share a bit of good news and also make a request of you.

As you know, the Church operates on the calendar year for its fiscal reporting. It isn't that we have chosen man's year (which begins in the middle of the winter in the Northern Hemisphere) over the biblical year (which begins in the spring), but U.S. tax laws and other factors make it more convenient for us to use Jan. 1 through Dec. 31 as our fiscal year. Because of that decision, this is my first letter of the new fiscal year, and I want to share some of the most recent and positive developments in the Church as we look ahead to another year.

When the Ministerial Board of Directors (MBOD) approved our 2017 budget in early December, we based it on projections for the end of the year. We chose a conservative figure for our 2017 budget, which included a modest increase in income of 3 to 4 percent. I am happy to report to you that we now know our projection for the end of 2016 was off, but it was off in a good way! The increase in our actual income will be closer to 8 percent, depending on donations received in January but postmarked prior to midnight, Dec. 31. This higher than expected increase resulted from an extraordinary month of December—up more than 20 percent over December 2015.

This good financial news could not come at a better time for the organization. In December the MBOD approved a resolution authorizing the administration to locate and purchase property in the general area of our current headquarters for the construction of our own office building. The board also expressed that, if possible, we should purchase enough property for future expansion. The initial building proposal is for a modest, 20,000- to 25,000-square-foot office that would include warehouse storage space to replace the storage units we currently rent.

Our goal is to locate and purchase land and begin the construction of an office to be finished before the termination of our current lease (May 31, 2018). This brings me to the request I have for you.

The Bible is our instruction book, and within its pages we find an important formula for the people of God. Whenever a major decision or an unusual situation presented itself, the people of God fasted and prayed. Such fasting is not for the purpose of persuading God of anything, but of humbling ourselves to seek and accept His will. While we address fasting on a regular basis in local congregations and articles from the office, we have made no special request for a day of fasting in recent years. Quite honestly, there have been any number of personal trials experienced by members and major disasters around the world affecting members that made our physical needs as an organization seem less important. I know that many of us here in the office have chosen to

fast to seek God's direction in the organization and in our personal lives. Now I would like to ask that we all choose a day in the next few weeks to fast, seeking God's direction in this very important decision. We need to decide on property before the spring holy days, and possibly as soon as the end of this month (January). Therefore, the request is that we all take a day to fast in the next few weeks, certainly before the Passover.

To build makes perfect sense when you consider we are currently paying more than \$150,000 per year to lease office space. We have already calculated that the mortgage on our own office building would be about the same amount, or only slightly higher. We also know that when our current lease expires in 2018, the amount we would pay going forward would certainly go up—probably even doubling. It makes all the sense in the world to own a building rather than paying others to lease theirs—if the cost is roughly the same. Even though it makes perfect financial sense, especially with the cost of borrowing money at record lows, it is still an important decision for such a young organization. In any decision we make, we want to seek God's will and His wisdom. This is why we fast as individuals and as a group.

To be more specific, we are asking God to direct us to the right piece of property at the right price. We also need Him to guide us in securing a mortgage, choosing architects, a construction company, and to grant us favor with city government for the permits that will be necessary for construction. Having been involved in a number of similar projects in the past, I know that things do not always go smoothly, and that we will undoubtedly face some challenges along the way. But with God's help, even those difficult situations can work to our benefit.

I also realize that some may feel a bit jaded by yet another construction project, given all we have been through. I completely understand this and know that anytime we discuss building, it can recall unpleasant memories and concerns. I sometimes experience these feelings myself. At the same time, we are at an important juncture in our short history. The administration and the MBOD are in complete agreement that the sensible and prudent thing to do is to purchase land and build our own office rather than continue paying ever-increasing costs for an office lease.

Since we have been talking about this possibility for several months, some have already submitted donations with the note "for the building fund." While we are thankful for such generosity, I want to let you know that we have no plans to establish a separate building fund. It isn't that we don't want donations to help with the building, but rather that we are committed to living within our means. In other words, if we don't have the funds to complete this project and if we can't afford the payments once completed, then we shouldn't begin. When addressing the need to "count the cost" spiritually, Christ used the physical principle of counting the cost before starting a building project, making sure one "has enough to finish it" (Luke 14:28-30). Buying land and constructing an office building at this time are not contingent upon additional funds being donated. This past year as an organization our expenses came in under budget by approximately \$130,000. Our employees are committed to living within their budgets, and because of that, along with the fact that our income exceeded expectations, we added almost \$900,000 to our cash reserves this past year alone. This was a record amount for the organization.


Financially, we are in a position to move forward without setting up a special building fund. But I do want to assure everyone that any funds we receive are certainly welcome and will be appreciated. If they are labeled for the new office building, they will be used for that purpose, but we are not advertising or requesting special donations for the building. According to U.S. law,

when a nonprofit receives funds for a specific purpose, they must be used for that purpose or returned to the donor.

From a financial perspective, 2016 was our best year since we began in 2010. We also saw modest growth in membership in different areas of the world. I pray every day that God will call more new people. Of course, when we pray, we accept that the answer to those prayers is in God's hands. If we ask according to God's will, we have confidence that He will hear (1 John 5:14). God the Father is ultimately responsible for calling new people (John 6:44), but we must do our part to make the gospel available to as many people as possible, with the confidence that He will accomplish His will!

Thank you again for your financial support and your prayers during the past year. They were much appreciated! As we begin a new fiscal year, we look forward to even greater accomplishments. We also accept that there will be challenges, but we have confidence that the end result will be according to God's will. With prayer and fasting, I am confident God will lead us to the right decisions.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks