

**IOWA CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
AUGUST 28-29, 2009**

Members Present: Lof, Nelson, Altenbaumer, Douglas, Hanon, Mears, Noer, Boege,
Fisher, Love, Wohlhuter, Whiteman, Vass

Absent (with prior notice): Guffey-Lewis, Darmour-Paul, Stonebraker, Howie, Sargent

Absent (without prior notice): None

Also Present: CM Pleva, ACM's Jensen, Havelka, Stoik

The meeting was held at the Pilgrim Heights Camp and Retreat Center.

August 28, 2009

The Chair of the Board, Laura Lof, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The Board members and staff engaged in team-building activities and sharing ideas about leadership. Following these introductory activities, CM Pleva led the Board in a period of Bible study and a discussion of Romans 1:18-32.

At 8:30 p.m. the Chair recessed the meeting to allow the Board teams to meet.

August 29, 2009

The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Election of Officers

For some time, the Board has been electing its officers for one-year terms. CM Pleva reported that he has reviewed the Conference bylaws and has determined that it is unnecessary to do so. After discussion, it was the determination of the Board that CM Pleva's interpretation of the bylaws was correct.

BOD 2009-27. Nelson/Vass that no election of officers is necessary; and that Laura Lof and William Howie shall continue to serve in their respective capacities of Chair and Vice Chair without need for reelection at this time. Approved unanimously.

Financial Reports

CM Pleva distributed the YTD financial reports. A discussion of the reports followed. The discussion included the following matters:

- *Profit and loss budget performance report.* A comparison of budgeted amounts to actual amounts YTD shows that income is down significantly. This is offset in

large part by a decrease in expenses. Other than that, the budget-to-actual comparison is fairly unremarkable. CM Pleva noted that actual income figures traditionally lag behind the budget at this time of year because OCWM contributions are not received in equal amounts each month. Typically, monthly income figures exceed budgeted amounts as year-end approaches.

- *Balance sheet.*
 - Current Assets. The cash balance in the Conference account at Freedom Financial Bank is currently in excess of the maximum amount of FDIC insurance for that account. This will be corrected in the next week.
 - Fixed Assets. Some asset values shown on the balance sheet are problematic. Depreciation schedules have not been adjusted in some time. The process of adjusting them and bringing them up to date is the next project that will be undertaken.
 - Other Assets. CM Pleva cautioned the Board to remember (a) that the total value shown for Other Assets includes amounts of cash that are subject to offsetting liabilities shown elsewhere on the balance sheet; and (b) that additional amounts of cash are held in restricted funds.
 - Accounting for prior-year receipts and disbursements. Approximately \$125,000 of Other Assets represents funds carried over from year to year for donations that were received but for which off-setting disbursements were either never made or improperly accounted for. The Conference staff is trying to clean this up, and hopes to have done so by the end of the year. He cautioned that there may still be material amounts of cash that cannot be accurately accounted for. It may ultimately require Board action to correct.

Conflict-of-Interest Forms

CM Pleva reported that the Conference Conflict-of-Interest Policy requires that the Conference Minister, the Associate Conference Ministers, the officers of the Conference and the members of the Board annually sign statements affirming (a) that they have received a copy of the Policy; (b) that they have read and understand the Policy; and (c) that they agree to comply with it. Appropriate forms were distributed to the affected persons present and were executed and returned.

Conference Minister's Report

CM Pleva gave the Conference Minister's report. A copy of the Report is attached to these minutes.

Team Meetings.

The Chair recessed the meeting at 9:30 a.m. to allow the Board Teams to continue the work from the prior evening. The meeting was again called to order at 11:00 a.m.

Iowa Conference Board and Staff Priorities/Conference Brochure

In 2006 the Board of Directors adopted a statement of board and staff priorities. CM Pleva proposes to revise this statement of priorities with a new document entitled “Iowa Conference Board and Staff Priorities”. Copies of the new document were distributed to the Board members for their review.

BOD 2009-28. Vass/Whiteman to approve “Iowa Conference Board and Staff Priorities” as written. Approved unanimously.

CM Pleva also reviewed the working draft of the text for the new Conference brochure to the Board. After much discussion, it was the consensus of the Board that only one change needed to be made to the draft. The Board recommended that the last bullet point in the section of the draft entitled “WHAT ARE THE MINISTRIES OF THE IOWA CONFERENCE?” be modified to say “We provide a voice ... “

Meeting of the “Great Plains Consultation”

In his Conference Minister’s report, CM Pleva reported on a recent meeting of representatives of the Kansas-Oklahoma, Nebraska, Northern Plains and South Dakota conferences. CM Pleva was invited to the meeting as an observer. Among the items discussed at the meeting was the possibility of sharing services among the conferences involved and the Iowa Conference. He reported that no decisions have been made, but that the participants would like to continue this conversation and have invited the Iowa Conference to send three representatives (including CM Pleva) to the next several meetings.

BOD 2009-29. Whiteman/Nelson to authorize CM Pleva to continue these discussions with the other conferences and to appoint the Iowa delegates for this process. Approved unanimously.

Sabbatical proposal

CM Pleva has applied for a grant to help defray the cost of his upcoming sabbatical. One of the conditions of approval of the grant is that the Conference certify that it has approved the sabbatical.

BOD 2009-30. Nelson/Vass to confirm that CM Pleva’s sabbatical has Board approval and to authorize the execution of necessary certifications and other documents. Approved unanimously.

Wider Church Service by CM Pleva

CM Pleva has been invited to serve on GFT III and on the Executive Council of the Council of Conference Ministers. He asked the Board for feedback about their feelings concerning his service. It was the consensus of the Board that CM Pleva should be

encouraged to continue his work for the wider church. In particular, the Board felt that his further participation in the work of GFT III was critical to the success of the efforts of that group.

BOD 2009-31. Whiteman/Mears to encourage CM Pleva to continue his involvement with the Governance Follow-up Team III. All in favor except Noer, who abstains.

Minutes of June 12, 2009 Meeting

BOD 2009-32. Noer/Whiteman to approve the minutes of the Board meeting of June 12, 2009. Approved unanimously.

Grant to New Missions United Church of Christ

The Conference has given a grant of \$300 to New Missions UCC, a new church start in West Des Moines to help defray the cost of having church representatives attend a new church start meeting in Atlanta. CM Pleva requested that the Board ratify this action.

BOD 2009-33. Altenbaumer/Love to approve and ratify the grant of \$300 to New Missions UCC. Approved unanimously.

Sexual Harassment Policy

ACM Havelka has reviewed the existing Iowa Conference Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment policy and has discussed it with the UCC's national counsel, Don Clark. As a result of this review and discussion, she has proposed that there be several changes made to the existing policy. A copy of the amended policy was distributed to the Board for their review and discussion.

BOD 2009-34. Vass/Nelson to table discussion of the changes to this policy pending further review and revision. Approved unanimously .

Conference Minister Evaluation

CM Pleva noted that he has never had a formal employee evaluation by the Board of Directors. The Administrative Team has recommended (a) that an *ad hoc* three-member task force be formed to design and implement a process for the conduct of such an evaluation; (b) that Rev. Sharon Guffey-Lewis be invited to chair this task force and, if she is unable or unwilling to serve, that the Chair of the Board appoint someone to act as chair in her stead; and (c) that the chair of the task force appoint the other two members.

BOD 2009-35. Whiteman/Vass to approve the recommendation of the Administrative Team. Approved unanimously.

Team Reports

The Board received reports from all three of its Teams.

Information Items

- Richard and Virginia Seifert have left \$7,285.63 to the Iowa Conference.
- There will be a dedication ceremony for the new Conference Office on October 24, 2009 from 2:00 - 4:00.

There being no further business to come before the meeting, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Mary Stonebraker, Secretary

Conference Minister's Report to the Board of Directors
Iowa Conference, United Church of Christ

28 August 2009

It has been an eventful summer!

- Immediately following our meeting in June we experienced a fine and decidedly upbeat Annual Meeting. Many thanks to those who helped in the planning and execution of that event.
- The move into the new office happened the following week. We aren't yet 100% settled, but I believe the staff already feels at home there and on the whole things are working out well. Parking – as anticipated – is not ideal, but I'm still hopeful we will be able to add one oversized space dedicated to the handicapped in front of the building.
- Our 20 delegates, the ministerial staff and I, as well as a significant number of visitors from around the conference attended General Synod at the end of June. The spirit of the meeting was good, and the Synod, by an overwhelming majority (but not without vocal opposition) adopted a variant of the resolution we presented encouraging forward movement on the creation of single (unified) governance for the national setting of the church. I have been asked to continue on a newly constituted "Governance Follow-up Team," but have not yet responded to the request. I'd appreciate about your input.
- In early August I attended a gathering of representatives from the several UCC conferences to our direct west. I will report more fully on that gathering later.
- Just a week ago, our newest "employee" (technically she's a "temp-to-hire" at this point), Judy Peterson, began work. Judy's title is "Assistant to the Conference Minister." My initial impressions are very positive and in the email memo you received yesterday, you've already seen some of the kind of work she will do on my and our behalf.
- Earlier this week the staff and I spent a full day meeting with a consultant from ACS Technologies – the firm from which we are purchasing database software. It may seem hard to imagine (at least it is to me), but the Iowa Conference has never had any sort of truly centralized database. This reality is increasingly a hindrance to our work and wastefully inefficient. Over the next couple months I am confident we will see a significant transition in the way we organize the many sets of data by which much of our work is organized. This will be somewhat costly upfront (and will necessitate that the staff learn new habits of work), but in the long run I expect to gain significant efficiencies from this investment.

In the email materials that Judy sent you yesterday, you received a copy of the sabbatical grant proposal which I've submitted to the Louisville Institute. We'll talk about that a bit later, but I'd like to emphasize one particular point I made in that proposal. After briefly rehearsing the challenges this board (some of you, and your predecessors) have addressed over the past 4 years, I reported (with relief!), that we are now in a period of relative calm. Having said that, I

went on to report that this period of calm is NOT and must not be our ultimate goal. Instead, we must choose to see this period of respite from the stresses of the past several years as an opportunity to more clearly define and refine our mission – our essential *raison d'être* – and space during which we may devise and embrace the strategic plan by which we will accomplish AND FUND that mission. Make no mistake, though we currently have some money in the bank, the long term prognosis for OCWM support from churches is at first gradually downward, and then increasingly downward the further we get into the future. These are systemic issues over which we have only some influence, but if we do not plan for a future in which this work is shaped differently than it has been in the past, and funded differently than in the past, it will be increasingly difficult for it to continue. Our meeting this weekend is really a down payment on that ongoing process of planning, evaluation and then more planning which I understand (together with financial development) to the essential work of this board.

The above serves as a logical transition point for my report about the gathering of what I will call the “Great Plains Consultation” in Sioux Falls, SD, early in August. I was invited as an observer to a meeting of representative from the 4 UCC conferences to our immediate west. In addition to obvious demographic similarities, these four conferences (Kansas-Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, Northern Plains) have another important similarity – they are each served by only one professional employee – the conference minister. A conversation has evolved over the past several years about efficiencies which might be gained if these conferences could work together more closely. Models as loose as informal sharing of employee services to as tight as organic merger have been discussed. No formal decisions have been made, but agreement has been reached to continue the conversation – particularly with an eye to devising mechanisms by which support services can be formally shared, but short of merging the conferences. To that end, the Iowa Conference has been invited to participate more fully in the next round of these talks. I think it is in our interest that we do so. This next round of conversations will center of ways to share financial services, communication services, and support for administrative functions like search and call and the Committee on Ministry processes. We are being invited to send three reps to a meeting this fall (with a likely follow-up meeting in the winter) to try devising a proposal to accomplish such sharing of services. Our staff and I discussed this at our retreat a week and ago, and among ideas we batted around was the formation of a shared services corporation – one that might even be housed here in Iowa. That possibility was NOT named in Sioux Falls, but I think it needs to be on the table, and I’m strongly recommending you formally agree to enter into this conversation. As I see it, it could be one part (and only one part) of the larger and ongoing strategy by which we reinvent (and fund) what it means to a conference of the United Church of Christ in the years ahead.

Earlier I mentioned last week’s staff retreat. The Iowa Conference is blessed with a remarkable professional staff! The ACM’s (and Dianne Prichard, our CLS director) comprise a talented, interesting, funny and highly committed group (to say nothing of the sarcasm of which this group is capable!). We are – none of us! – carbon copies of the others. Instead we complement each other well and are able (and willing) to challenge each other and seek ideas and strategies by which to most effectively and faithfully do this somewhat odd work to which we have been called. I mention this because this staff is the conference’s greatest asset for doing our common work. I value them profoundly and I hope you will also find ways to thank them for their work. We certainly can’t pay them the true value of what they do, so let us be sure that they experience other rewards for their dedication.

Finally, I have now been with you four years without any true evaluation or review. This is not acceptable. It is one of your essential and basic responsibilities to monitor and review the performance of the executive you have employed to implement the vision/mission to which we understand ourselves to have been called. I'm not really scolding you about this – church based organizations have a long and hoary tradition of neglecting employee review until and unless the time comes when we AREN'T satisfied. I've chosen to assume that the lack of review at least partly signals satisfaction with my work. Nonetheless, you and I both will be better served if we engage in regular review of my work on your behalf. The relationship between a chief executive and his/her board is, of course, complicated. Is the executive to be the leader of or the servant of the board? Pragmatically it is certainly both, but technically I am your servant and you owe it to yourselves and to the entire conference healthy oversight of and evaluation of that which I do on your behalf. It seems to me (and correct me if I'm wrong about this – after all, I've never been in this kind of role before) that this is one process I can't and shouldn't lead. My suggestion (which you are free to ignore and/or modify) is that you designate one of your more responsible members to convene a small and *ad hoc* evaluation committee to initiate this process on your behalf. Another important part of review is the allocation of my time and energy. I mentioned earlier the request that I continue service on a reconstituted GFT-III in the national setting of the church. I've also been asked to consider service on the cabinet of the Council of UCC Conference Ministers. This is also an honor (albeit a thorny one). I value your advice and counsel about these kinds of matters.

Finally, a few words about my upcoming sabbatical and others further down the road: If the Louisville Institute chooses to fund the proposal I've made, we will be well situated to cope with my three month absence – at least financially. However, we've made no plans for other employee sabbaticals further down the road. If we are committed to the model of sabbatical (and I hope we are), then we must be thinking of two obvious needs – both with significant financial impact:

- How do we provide staff coverage during the three month period in which a member of our professional staff is away, and
- Do we have a responsibility to offer at least some financial support for whatever program of refreshment and growth our employee entering into sabbatical might desire to enter into?

I would suggest that beginning with next year's budget we begin to set aside in a Sabbatical Fund a regular amount which can accumulate to offer support for the above needs.

Thank you for the privilege of working with the churches and people of this conference and the privilege of doing so in cooperation with this staff. Even though there are times of significant frustration in this work, I can honestly report I cannot imagine anything else I would rather be doing nor any other place where I would rather be doing it.

God bless you!