

# b-mail



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*I Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."*

In the November issue of the B-mail, I gave you a brief history of how the Executive Leadership Team came to the point of making the recommendation to join the Missionary Church. That issue also spelled out the three decision points that will be involved if this recommendation is going to become a reality. The first will be the US National Board meeting on April 20-21, 2004. The second would be a referendum vote by the members of local churches when they vote for the delegates to the US National Conference during the month of October, 2004. The third decision point will be the US National Conference where approval of the issue must receive two-thirds vote of the voting delegates. The US National Conference is scheduled for June 20-24, 2005.

My hope was that such basic information would help to stop some of the rumors which were being circulated. In this issue, I would like to speak more to the thinking of the Executive Leadership Team in making this recommendation to the US National Board. The current state of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA, is not in desperate condition and we, the members of the Executive Leadership Team, do not want to see the church get into a very desperate situation. The financial strain that has been experienced this year is one of the major reasons why the Executive Leadership Team decided that we needed to take a good look at our situation, and decide what would be the most beneficial direction for us to consider. As you know by now, the Executive Leadership Team has agreed that our recommendation to join with the Missionary Church is the best option at this time.

The Executive Leadership Team met on December 9, 2003, with six of the appointed leaders from the Missionary Church, and discussed many of the issues that have been raised by individuals in the UB Church. The meeting went very well, and there were no surprises. All of the items, which we previously were speculating about, were confirmed as the way we understood them in our previous discussions. Steve Dennie is preparing a separate sheet which will have questions and answers that were covered in the meeting. I'm not going to spend time in this issue talking about those particular concerns. Following the meeting with the Missionary Church leaders, the Executive Leadership Team met and was in strong agreement that this is the best option for the United Brethren Church at this time.

I know that some of you are having a difficult time understanding why we're making such a recommendation. I want to try and give some insight into the thinking of the members of the Executive Leadership Team.

Our goal is to see healthy, reproducing congregations. We adopted a goal of having 100 healthy congregations by the year 2010. We've started working with a number of our healthier churches through Healthy Church Clusters. We had a

### **Ministers: Feel Free to Call to Talk to Us**

If you have questions or concerns, I invite you to call me on our toll-free number. I realize that our pastors are a key part of this, and I want them to have access to people who can answer their questions.

Gary Dilley and Steve Dennie are also available. If you call my secretary, Susan Hoopingarner, she can direct you to one of us.

Our email addresses are:  
paul@ub.org  
gary@ub.org  
steve@ub.org

### **Websites and Email**

Much information about the Missionary Church, the issues involved, and other aspects of this subject has been posted on the UB website at:

[www.ub.org/mc](http://www.ub.org/mc)

### **Beside Still Waters**

Pastors can stay free for 7-14 days in the Bradenton, Florida area. The unit has a full kitchen; however, you must provide your own food, entertainment, and transportation. No pets or RVs are allowed. If you are interested, call toll-free 1-877-608-0999, or go to the website, [www.beside-stillwaters.org](http://www.beside-stillwaters.org).

### **Pray for Pastoral Appointments Needed at the Following Churches:**

Log Cabin - Boise, ID  
Otterbein - Parsons, KS  
Central - Montpelier, OH  
Friendship - Vancouver, WA  
First UB - Van Wert, OH  
Coleta - Coleta, IL

Healthy Church Retreat. We're using the Growing a Healthy Church training and the Natural Church Development survey as tools to help focus our attention on the steps necessary for churches to become healthy, reproducing congregations.

However, we have limited resources with which to help facilitate this process. We've reduced the size of the Headquarters' staff over the past 25 years from a high of 26 to our current staff of 10. This reduction of staff was intentional in order to hold overhead costs down, and so funds would be available for development of ministries in the local church. The main reason we have had to reduce the Headquarters' staff has been because churches are not growing, and we haven't been successful in planting new churches which can eventually help share the financial burdens. I have argued for years that the Headquarters operation is here to support local church ministry development, and it should not be a burden to the local church. I believe that firmly.

The only way to increase revenue is to increase the number of congregations and the size of those congregations. We've had very limited success in increasing our numbers over the last 20 years. The Missionary Church has, in the last 25 years, almost doubled the number of churches and the number of people attending those churches. This makes the Missionary Church an attractive partner for us.

The Missionary Church has been much more successful in church multiplication, in world missions, and in healthy church development than we have in the past 20-25 years. Since the Missionary Church has been able to show much better progress in these areas, it makes sense to join them in the endeavor to accomplish the goals that we hold in common.

The issue of having enough critical mass—the number of churches and people to fund an adequate headquarters' operation—is one of the reasons why it's a very good choice for us to join the Missionary Church. If we bring our 250 churches together with their 400, it will give us 650 churches and almost 80,000 attenders. By combining our numbers, we'll be able to increase the strength of both churches.

I'm well aware that none of us are excited about giving up our identity as United Brethren. However, we must honestly ask if that identity is more important than doing whatever it takes to be more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission. I have been a United Brethren all my life and I am grateful for that tradition. However, it should not interfere with our desire to be the most effective we can for reaching our world for Christ. I'm reminded that Jesus was pretty critical of those who placed tradition above the work of God.

Some of you have asked if this is the only option. The answer is no, it is not the only option, but the Executive Leadership Team and I believe it is the best option, and it will help us be more effective in the work that we are involved in. The other options are not as positive because I believe that we will not be as strong with a smaller headquarters or no headquarters at all. I do not want to see the church get into a situation where we become too weak to continue.

1 Corinthians 1:10 should challenge us to work toward agreement and not be divided. I hope that we are united in our mindset that we want to see our churches be healthy and reproducing, and to see many lives changed. We may have differences of opinion as to how to best do that, but we do not want to permit those differences to cause division in the body of Christ. I am looking forward to coming to each of the conferences and to answering your questions as we talk about the possibility of joining with the Missionary Church. As you look at the list of meetings that have been set, if you think it would be appropriate to request additional meetings in your area, please contact my office and we will do our best to accommodate your request.