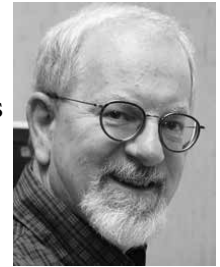


This will be my last National Conference report as Director of Communications. Since I retire at the end of August, everything I've been doing for quite a while has been my "last time"—last Thank Offering, last ELT meeting, last Worldview, last staff outing at a Tin Caps game. And now, my last NC report.

It's been a fun and fulfilling ride, these last 45 years. I've decided to mostly just tell you about that ride. For the historical record. And because whatever lies ahead for this role is not my call, but will be in the capable hands of my successor. So let's go back 45 years.

No, let's make that 189 years.



Steve Dennie
Director of
Communications

The Long Line of Editors

In 1834, Rev. William Rhinehart became editor of our first denominational publication, *The Religious Telescope*, which premiered December 31, 1834. I'm a very distant successor of Rhinehart. Before I wandered into the picture, 19 different persons held the title, three of them more than once (in some cases, I suspect, a consolation prize for not being elected bishop). The editor was pretty much out there doing his own thing. The *Religious Telescope* was widely, which gave the editor high visibility and name recognition. Back then, the editor, arguably, exceeded the bishops in being the face and voice of the denomination.

Rhinehart, like the other early editors, was a vocal abolitionist. After Rhinehart came Rev. William Hanby, who actively sheltered and smuggled escaped slaves as part of the Underground Railroad. Hanby served six years, 1839-1845, took four years off to try the bishopric, then returned to the *Telescope* for another three years. John Lawrence worked with Hanby for two of those years as assistant editor, then took over for the next 11 years. He left in the middle of the Civil War to become a chaplain in the Union army and, eventually, judge of a Freedman's court in Nashville, where he spent the rest of his life. Lawrence—prolific, readable, and direct—wrote the excellent *The Slavery Question* along with a two-volume history of the denomination (all still available on Amazon). He was followed by Daniel Berger, who saw fit to write his own big fat history of the denomination. The next big fat UB history came from me in 2017.

Milton Wright took over in 1869 as editor and filled the role for eight years before being elected bishop. In 1885, the conservative or "radical" element of the church, led by Wright, launched an alternative publication called *The Christian Conservator*. After Wright's group tumultuously split off in 1889, the *Conservator* became the official publication of the new denomination (that would be us). The editorship basically got handed off from person to person. Either nobody could stomach the job for long, or they were just biding time until something came along more to their liking.

That lasted until 1925, when Rev. William Ziegler took the reins and stayed for 24 years as editor of *The Christian Conservator*. He was good, very good. So was his successor, Ernest Gingrich (whom I had the privilege of meeting), who stayed eight years. Under Gingrich, the publication's name changed to *The United Brethren* and adopted a magazine format.

Stanley Peters, a UB minister and church planter who had always dabbled in printing, became editor in 1959. He continued in that role for 22 years, and put out 491 issues of *The United Brethren*. In addition, he cranked out adult and youth Sunday school curriculum, including a Sunday school take-home paper called

Contact, which was the bailiwick of his assistant editor. Which is where I started.

Young and Inexperienced

In the spring of 1978, as a junior at Huntington University, I took a Journalism course taught by Elsa Houtz. I had no definite life goals, but was probably headed toward becoming a newspaper reporter. Elsa, who had worked two years as assistant editor, learned that the job was coming open. The assistant editor at the time, Dennis Miller, was heading to Pennsylvania to begin a two-year stint as assistant pastor at King Street UB church. Elsa suggested I apply for the position.

I applied, was hired, and started June 1, 1978. Denny and I had a month overlap before he skipped town and began an extraordinary career in the pastorate. I worked part-time during my senior year of college, graduated with a Communications degree, and went fulltime.

For three years I edited *Contact*, assisted Stan with the Sunday school quarterlies, and helped produce the monthly *United Brethren* magazine (for which I wrote a monthly column which I dubbed “Random Pokes”). I enjoyed the work, and honed my skills in writing, editing, and page design.

A good chunk of the United Brethren Headquarters building—let’s say 40%—consisted of the denominational printshop. The denomination heavily subsidized the printing operation, because the publications lost money and the printshop couldn’t attract enough commercial jobs to pay the bills. That prompted the 1981 General Conference to close the printshop and discontinue all Sunday school curriculum. We would keep the *United Brethren* magazine, but that’s all.

And thus ended the position of assistant editor. I fully expected to be looking for a job, and had nothing particular in mind. But the day after General Conference ended, I received a call from Dr. Kent Maxwell, chairperson of the new Board of Church Services, which had oversight of the magazine. He told me the incoming board had voted to offer the job of editor to me. Well. I said yes.

That was June, and the printshop wouldn’t officially close for another six months. Stan Peters and I had to work together for another six months, and it was certainly awkward at times, since I was taking the job he had faithfully filled since I was three years old. But let me tell you—though hurt, Stan was kind to me and altogether exemplary. I always hoped that, if the Church ever opted for somebody else over me (and every time a new bishop was elected, that was a possibility) that I would be as selflessly servant-like as Stan Peters. In the years ahead, until his death in 2014, Stan remained gracious to me. He was a good, good man, and a wonderful servant of the Church. I want everyone to know that.

Becoming Editor

That December of 1981, I went to California to spend Christmas with my parents and siblings (my parents pastored the UB church in Pixley, Calif.). When I returned to Huntington at the beginning of 1982, Stan’s office was empty. I moved in and got to work.

One of the first things I did was to take control of the entire magazine. It had been parceled out to various church entities. UB Missions provided six pages every month, two pages came from Huntington College, two from the bishops (we had four bishops back then), two from the Church Services department, one from the Archives, and one from Carlson Becker as director of Stewardship. By taking control of all

printing real estate, I could deal extensively with themes. If I wanted to devote most of an issue to missions, to church planting, to an extended interview with the bishops, or to a lengthy feature article about a UB person, event, or issue, I could do that. It was a good move. That first year, we received an award from the Evangelical Press Association for Most Improved Denominational Magazine.

In the years ahead, we received three more awards from the EPA, all for articles I wrote. Two came in 1984: third place in the General Article category, and second place in the Humor category for one of my Random Pokes columns (first place went to *Moody Monthly*, third place to *Leadership Journal*). In 1986, my feature article “Notes on an Abortion Forum” won second place in the General Article category. Again, we were in good company: first place was a tie between *Campus Life* and *Leadership Journal*, and third place went to *Moody Monthly*).

Back then, I typed articles on my IBM Correcting Selectric II. Our commercial printer typed them up and sent me long strips of type, like we’d been doing in-house before selling all printshop assets. I would scissor the strips apart, apply hot wax to the bottom, arrange type on a page, use a T-square to make sure everything was passably straight, and then press it all down with a hand roller. It was medieval.

At the beginning of 1983, I came back from Christmas vacation to find a whole bunch of unopened boxes sitting on my desk. There was an AT&T MS-DOS computer with two 5.25” floppy drives (no hard drive). An Okidata dot-matrix printer. Manuals galore—for the computer, the operating system, the printer, and for WordStar, the word processing program I would use. Gobs of cords. And there were boxes of blank disks, which I eventually discovered needed to be formatted...whatever that was.

In three weeks, I would need to deliver the February magazine articles, on a disk, preferably formatted, to the printer. I tackled numerous learning curves, and am glad to report that a February 1983 edition of the *United Brethren* magazine does, indeed, exist.

God Bless the Macintosh

But we were still doing things primevally. I spent untold hours hunched over a light table with long strips of phototypeset copy, a T-square, border tape of various thicknesses, pica gauge, roller, photo-resizing percentage wheel, and other now-obsolete tools of the trade. I typically spent 2-3 nights a month working through the night, something a young single guy could do. It was not unusual for a bishop or someone else to be there until late, but by 10:00, I had the building to myself. I would crank up my cassette player—REO, Heart, Europe, Boston, CCR—and while away the hours, most of it at the light table. Dawn would creep in. When I heard someone unlock the back door and turn on the hall lights, I figured it was time to go home.

That continued until 1988, when we invested in a Mac, which changed my life (a big thanks to Church Services director Paul Hirschy). It was a Mac II, with a 12-inch green monitor and a gigantic 20-megabyte hard drive. Before: to make a simple box, I might spend 20 minutes with border tapes and the T-square, getting it *mostly* straight. Now: I could make a perfect box in three seconds. Magic. The long nights came to an end, and just in time, because Pam and I got married in July 1989.

Interlude: About Pam

Pam Mize and I met at New Hope UB church in Huntington, while she (six years younger than me) was

a student at Huntington University. She caught my attention by coming to New Hope on Sunday nights by herself. It gave me an insight into her Christian commitment, because most college students (like, uh, me) only attended church on Sunday mornings.

Our first date, in 1983, was to the UB Headquarters Christmas banquet, which was held at a restaurant in Marion. Bishop Wilber and Mossie Sites chaperoned us to Marion. Pam graduated in 1984 and began working for an accounting firm in Huntington. Our relationship deepened, though it took me six years to realize what was perfectly clear to my parents, my coworkers, and pretty much the rest of the known universe—that this was the girl for me. I proposed in February 1989, and we were the first wedding Denny Miller conducted as pastor of Emmanuel Community Church.

By then, Pam was a CPA with the Christen-Souers LLC accounting firm in Fort Wayne. She has now been a partner for 27 years, and figures on working several more years while I goof off. Over the years, Pam has been far more involved in my occupational world than I've been involved in hers. She pitches in to help at national conferences, has attended all kinds of Headquarters and denominational functions, and has sat through hundreds of General Conference and National Conference reports going back to 1989. When it comes to United Brethren events, Pam wants to be at my side, and I appreciate having her there.

The End of the Magazine

The *United Brethren* magazine continued losing subscriptions, year after year, just as it had been doing before I arrived. I would attend Evangelical Press Association conventions and hear the same trend from editors of other denominational magazines, big and small. They shared creative and sometimes costly ideas for attracting new subscribers and keeping current ones, but nothing worked; circulation kept dropping. I listened to my fellow editors gripe about how people just weren't loyal anymore and otherwise castigate their constituencies. It wasn't a good look, and not something I cared to emulate. No dummy, I saw the writing on the wall. We needed to do something different.

In early 1993, I chaired a small study committee (Ron Ramsey was on it) which recommended discontinuing the magazine and replacing it with a communications strategy based on newsletters. We would eliminate the subscription system and distribute the newsletters free to all UB attendees via church bulletins. In addition, rather than be part of the Department of Church Services, my job would be centralized under the Office of the Bishop. And, after 189 years, the editor would get a new title: Communications Director.

The December 1993 *United Brethren* magazine was the last. In its place came two eight-page newsletters—one for missions, one for everything else—for about the same cost as the 32-page magazine. Thus, our circulation increased from 3500 subscribers to nearly 20,000 people—people occupying UB pews who might never have subscribed to a magazine. Every month, after the printed newsletters were delivered to the UB Headquarters, I corralled several staff to help box them up (different amounts for different churches). We would ship 225+ boxes via UPS to UB churches across the country, and then I'd order pizza for everyone. Always from Pizza Junction. That happened every single month. The newsletter strategy worked pretty well, and eliminated the hand-wringing about losing subscribers.

In 1998, I upgraded the newsletters to color (instead of just two colors), cut the length to four pages, and reduced the frequency to six times a year. Four-color was much more expensive, but by reducing the size

and frequency, the cost stayed the same. Again, it was a good move, and it upgraded the product for our people. The downside: we got pizza just six times a year.

The newsletters came to an end in 2003, amidst discussions about joining the Missionary Church. They just died a quiet death, and information dissemination moved almost entirely to the internet. So let's back up a few years and talk about the game-changing and sometimes wild and whacky internet.

The Web World

In 1997, the internet crashed into my tidy world of print communications. We got in early enough to secure a two-letter web domain, ub.org (which various entities have offered to buy over the years). John Paff, then my counterpart at Huntington University, designed our first website using Microsoft FrontPage. The University hosted the website; I dialed in to make revisions. In 1998, the college ran a fibre-optic cable into our building, thereby connecting us to their high-speed network. What a blessing!

Before long, my humble office was hosting three servers, which I named after important UB people from our history—a web server (Meadows), an email server (Fleming), and a server for our Filemaker database (Otterbein). I originally designed the database for Bishop Ray Seilhamer in 1993. It became available over our internal network in 1998, and in 2002 a searchable UB church directory went online, using info generated live from Filemaker.

Although we started with John Paff's original UB website in 1997, I redesigned it from scratch in 1998 in Cyberstudio, then again in 2001 using Dreamweaver.

During that first decade of the millennium, various UB websites came and went—separate sites for youth and women's ministry teams, for staff openings, for UB news (ubonline.org). The Bishopblog.org provided commentary from the bishop and his staff. HealthyMinistryResources.com described the ministries of the national office and the materials people could order. In early 2001 I started a web-based discussion forum (which I shut down in 2004, because it became highly contentious during the Missionary Church discussions), plus two email-based discussion groups—PastorTalk and YouthTalk. I launched AtMyChurch.com, a service for designing and hosting websites for UB churches (maybe eight churches participated). We collected email addresses of UB people and began using Constant Contact for mass emailings.

It was all too much, diluting our communications efforts among a whole bunch of different URLs and thwarting any attempt at brand consistency. So, I began consolidating our sites. It coincided with the need to move everything to the cloud (and out of my very warm office).

As we approached 2010, it became clear that web technology had moved beyond my humble skills. We're talking about the underlying infrastructure, as well as the graphic appearance. So, I began hiring stuff out. A Christian graphic artist named Mark Wells (who would do a lot of work for us over the years) created fresh designs for UB.org and UBMissions.com, and then a Christian web-hosting company applied those designs to a Wordpress infrastructure. I took it from there, adding content to the skeleton. My knowledge of HTML and CSS has never gone deep, but has been sufficient and invaluable. Mark Wells also created a design for a new site, UBCentral.org, which became our news portal.

So we were down to just three websites, which was more manageable. The missions site, now located at UBGlobal.org, went live in April 2010, and the new UB.org and UBCentral.org went live in 2011. We

integrated Mailchimp into UBCentral.org, so that every day at 11 a.m., subscribers to “The UB Daily News” received an email containing all news posted during the previous 24 hours.

I also moved Filemaker to a cloud hosting company. It included a new design for the searchable church directory (thank you, Mark) that matched the look of UB.org. A few years later, a new version of Filemaker enabled me to design a mobile app which lets UB National Office people access information about UB people and churches.

That left only one server in my office—the one for email. We went through a couple different email services, trying to stay ahead of blacklists and spammers. The issue was finally forced when blacklists (all automated, with nobody to call) basically took our email system down. Phooey on this. Within a week, I had transitioned us to free Gmail accounts with Google Apps (which we still use, quite happily).

I’ve used an occasional e-letter called *Connect* to communicate information to subscribers; UB Global also sends a couple e-letters. Facebook has become an important way to get information out, especially urgent information, like prayer concerns, disaster relief needs, and event promos. The websites have more recently undergone major redesigns, and there have been constant tweaks.

Videos

Although we are definitely in the video age, I confess that video has not been my thing. I’m a print guy. However, in the 1990s I had the chance to dabble in video production, and it went pretty well.

In 1995 and 1996, with help from the Merillat Foundation, we produced a number of videos about our mission work. Five of us traveled together—me, Bishop Seilhamer, mission director Kyle McQuillen, Professor Lance Clark from Huntington University, and an HU student. Our first trip, to New York City, yielded two videos—one about our Chinese church in Manhattan, one about our Jamaican church in the Bronx. Next we went to Los Angeles, where we produced a video about our very exciting Hispanic churches that were part of Latin American Ministries. I typically sat in a chair and asked questions, while Lance and his student filmed over my shoulder. Then, back in Huntington, I would write a script based on what we filmed, identify specific footage to use, and sometimes actually do the basic editing. Then I would turn it over to Lance to do all the fancy stuff to make it a sharp-looking video.

In January 1995, a two-week trip to Asia resulted in four more videos about our work in Hong Kong, Macau, and Thailand. A year later, we traveled to Honduras and Nicaragua to produce two more videos.

Books

Then there were the books.

Around 1990, Dr. Eugene Habecker approached me about editing a biography of Orville Merillat. I spent a month totally rewriting another person’s work (including switching from third person to first person), and it was eventually published in that form by Dr. D. James Kennedy and Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (my name, appropriately, doesn’t appear anywhere).

I did a lot of freelance writing during the 1980s, selling articles to about 40 different Christian publications (a single guy’s gotta eat). In one case, I reworked a “Random Pokes” column about Murphy’s Laws related to church life and sold it to *Leadership Journal*. An InterVarsity Press editor saw it there and contacted

me about doing a whole book on Murphy's Laws for the church. They set me up with a talented cartoonist, and off we went. *Murphy Goes to Church* was published in 1990, *Murphy's Laws of Parenting* in 1991, and *Murphy's Laws of Marriage* in 1992. None of these provided deep theological insights or otherwise advanced the Great Commission.

The 1989 General Conference authorized a project to capture the life of Dr. Clyde Meadows, our bishop 1961-1969. That resulted in the book *In the Service of the King*, his autobiography "as told to Steve Dennie." I would drive to the Meadows home in Columbus, Ohio, and we would spend a couple hours in his basement office, where he would tell me story after story. I recorded them, transcribed the interviews, and the book took shape. It was unveiled during the 1993 General Conference. (Sidenote: Dr. Meadows first wife, Mabel, was my first piano teacher when they lived in Huntington in the 1960s.)

Marilyn Reeck, a UB endorsed missionary serving with Wycliffe in Honduras, took note of the Meadows book. While visiting in Indiana, she asked if I would be interested in writing the life story of her father, Archie Cameron, who led our work in Honduras for over 30 years. I told her I would soon be going to Honduras for a video project, and we could explore the idea there. Two months after the video shoot, I returned to Honduras on my own to start the book. The result was *Tío Archie and the Story of Honduras Conference*. There were several more trips to Honduras, plus trips to interview people in Florida, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Michigan. The book's continuing thread was Archie's life and ministry, but along the way I told the full story of Honduras Conference going back to the 1920s. I'm very proud of that book, and feel it tells a thrilling story about our denomination.

Tío Archie was released at the 2001 General Conference. Archie attended, and Huntington University used the occasion to bestow an honorary doctorate. So deserving. (*Tío Archie* is available on Amazon.)

The UB History Course used *Trials and Triumphs*, which covered our history up through 1981. In 2011, at the request of the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team, Bishop Phil Whipple approached me about updating our history. I got to work, mostly using material I had written over the years. The result was the two-volume *All for Christ*, published in 2017 for our 250th anniversary. The books focused on our history from 1981 to 1917, but also went much farther back to tell the whole history of an issue, a mission field, the itinerant system, or something else. (I refer to it regularly, including several times for this report.)

In 2019, I began working on a book about the United Brethren church during the Civil War. *Against the Blighting Curse* was published in the spring of 2023. It's my finest, and most ambitious, work.

I also published, on Amazon and on my own, two short books with some of my miscellaneous writing over the years: *Random Pokes* (2019) and *Random Pokes 2* (2022).

In retirement, I hope to write several more books related to United Brethren history.

Change, Constant Change

I've experienced something my predecessors as editor, for the most part, didn't experience: regular and significant change. They did pretty much the same thing throughout their tenure—produce the denominational periodical according to whatever time-table it used (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly). The same thing, week after week, month after month, year after year. There were tweaks, but rarely anything major.

I, on the other hand, have never had the chance to get bored. I was there in 1979 when our printshop

bought a Compugraphic phototypesetter (though I still typed articles on my IBM Selectric). I experienced moving to a computer for basic typesetting, then to desktop publishing, and then to full digital composition. For years I used Zip or Jazz drives to deliver publications to the printer; now the printer downloads my digital files from our FTP account. I went from the physical clipart subscription we received every month, to iStockphoto.com, an online subscription with millions of high-quality photos and illustrations. I advanced from a magazine to newsletters to the many-splendored internet world. I confronted a number of major learning curves—from InDesign and Photoshop, to web design and hosting, to Filemaker database design, to app interfaces for portable devices. It's been wild at times.

Along the way, there have been many other things that kept the job interesting and varied:

- I led our Bible quiz program 1981-1986. Having been a quizzer for six years, this was familiar territory.
- I've been deeply involved in all of the denominational conventions—the ones held in 1988 (Knoxville) and 1992 (Cincinnati), and nine national conferences since 2007. I've produced all kinds of printed materials and signage, and led workshops.
- In 1990 I enrolled in Ball State University's graduate program, taking nothing but night classes (typically going straight from work). Five years later, I received the Master of Public Relations.
- I've edited and compiled all General Conference and US National Conference reports going back to 1985 (when the master copy was printed on my dot-matrix printer, and then photocopied for delegates). I've been obsessive about giving conference materials graphic and editorial consistency.
- Out of necessity, I've developed into a decent graphic artist. I make no claim to any significant talent, only a knack which has served me well. For national conferences alone, I've designed hundreds of signs, as well as the conference logo several times.
- I've fielded scores of inquiries from people doing genealogy research about somebody in United Brethren history. All such phone calls get shunted to me, and I actually and truly enjoy dealing with them.
- For years, I dealt with debilitating Miniere's Disease; I kept a pillow in the office, and when vertigo struck, I would close the door, lay down on the floor, and try to sleep it off. A surgery in 2010 gave me my life back. In December 2021 I underwent radiation for prostate cancer, which we'd been keeping an eye on for several years. It's almost entirely gone now, PTL.

And now, it's time to wrap this thing up.

All is Calm

Since, say, 2010, not a *great* deal has changed with my position.

I started the *UB Year in Review* in 2012 and published it for nine years. I totally redesigned what we call the "UB Booklet," which is an excellent resource for informing people about the United Brethren Church; a revised edition came out in 2017 for the 250th anniversary. I regularly edit and design the *Worldview* newsletter for UB Global, and usually work on the Thank Offering and Easter Offering bulletin inserts.

But beyond those print publications, the focus has remained on internet communications. We've needed to move more into video, which, as I've said, is not my thing. I am totally knack-less when it comes to video. Fortunately, David Kline, who joined UB Global in 2014, is skilled with video. He has worked with Bishop

Todd Fetters on a number of video projects, as I watch helplessly but appreciatively.

It's time for a change. I've had a good run, a fulfilling run. I came with gifts suited to the job, and as communications needs changed, my abilities stretched to meet them. But I'm all stretched out. Now, I'm ready and eager to pass the baton.

I've been a UB all my life. My parents and grandparents were United Brethren. My parents met at Huntington University, and I've been a UB preacher's kid since high school. I've sampled most everything on the UB menu—camping (where I became a Christian under the preaching of Burt Lange), Bible quizzing, youth conventions, Huntington University, church planting, mission trips, conference council leadership. I've spent my entire adult life working in the same building at the corner of Lake and Guilford (though I've occupied four different offices). And I've had the amazing privilege of serving under eleven different bishops, all of whom, by the example of their Christian conduct and character, made me a better Christian.

Many people hate going to work. Not me. I've always been treated well, my abilities respected, and I've been given a shocking amount of latitude. I can point to a few difficult and trying times, but knowing how they ended, I can look back on all of them and affirm, "God is good."

Dr. Paul Fetters used to say that the United Brethren Church was both his vocation and his avocation—his "hobby," if you will, or what he did on the side. For him, that included editing a bunch of UB-related books. I've followed his example, to an extent, and plan to continue doing so. But, in retirement, I know that other things will come along that appeal to me and fit my interests. I'm anxious to greet them.

So there you go, my 45 years at the UB National Office and a vague glimpse beyond.

I love the United Brethren Church. I love our mindset from the beginning, which seeks unity on major issues while allowing diversity on so many other things about which Christians can legitimately disagree. I love the things we've stood for, especially our firm opposition to slavery during a time when so many denominations were compromising so they could find favor and start churches in the South. I love our college, my alma mater. I love the team at the National Office. I love the everyday people of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ who labor for Jesus in the trenches. I can recall immediately a number of UB ministers and laypersons who, at every encounter, have had something kind and affirming to say to me. We're good people.

My heroes have always been missionaries—*United Brethren* missionaries. Oliver Hadley, George Fleming, Betty Brown, Jana, Patti Stone, Richard and Miriam, Archie Cameron, a bunch of Bakers and Birdsalls and Datemas. But I've also been blessed by my relationships with so many UB bishops. At the top would be C. Ray Miller and Paul Hirschy, who were there when I started my career, right out of college. They saw this kid with embarrassing immaturities and inexperience, yet gave me far more encouragement, guidance, trust, and responsibility than I merited. I can't thank them enough.

And I thank you, all of you. It's been such a privilege to serve the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.