



Minutes of the Strategic Planning Conference of the Church of God

Embassy Suites Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee • September 13–15, 2011

Conference Host: Ronald Duncan, of Church of God Ministries
Conference Chair: Andy Stephenson, of Church of God Ministries
Conference Consultant/Facilitator: Raymond Rood, of The Genysys Group
Conference Recording Secretary: Joe Allison, of Church of God Ministries

CONFERENCE PLANNING AND PURPOSES

The fourth Strategic Planning Conference of the Church of God (previously known as “Visioning Conference”) convened in Nashville, Tennessee, September 13–15, 2011. The **planning committee members** were: Jay Barber, Mitchell Burch, John Carney, Rolland Daniels, C. Milton Grannum, Mark Jackson, Cynthia James, James Lyon, Vernon Maddox, Jenny Marble, Randy Montgomery, Charles Myricks, Rebecca New-Edson, Carron Odokara, Jorge Palacios, Erin Taylor, and Ray Rood along with staff members Ronald Duncan, Andy Stephenson, Joni Burnett, and Sue Baird. There were 132 conference delegates from across the movement in attendance.

Previous conferences identified the goals and values of the movement (the “why” of our planning), while this conference focused on specific changes that we should make in pursuit of these values (the “how” of our planning). With this in mind, the **central strategic question** for the conference was, “How can the Church of God move forward within this decade to bring glory to God and expand the Kingdom?” Conference presenters addressed **four components of that question**:

- How can we help our churches live out our Strategic Values?
- How can we best develop our future, emerging, and experienced leaders in and through our churches, colleges, state assemblies, mentoring resources and other means?
- How can we best organize ourselves locally, regionally, nationally, and globally in order that ministry is delivered in the most effective manner? What new or renewed structures need to be considered?
- How can the Church of God move forward from here?

CONFERENCE PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

Pre-conference reading consisted of Gilbert W. Stafford’s book, *Signals at the Crossroads* (Warner Press: 2011), which had been provided to participants in advance. This book updated and combined Dr. Stafford’s previous books, *The Church of God at the Crossroads* and *Vision for the Church of God at the Crossroads*, with additional observations made just before his death in March 2008.

General Session 1: 6:30–10:00 PM on Tuesday, September 13

Dr. Ronald V. Duncan welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the conference purpose and format. He reviewed the objectives and outcomes of the 2006 SPC, and highlighted the work of the Transformation Teams that have been working on the SPC's Strategic Goals since that time. He introduced guest consultants Dr. George Bullard and Ray Rood.

Ray Rood presented an overview of the process that would be used by the break-out groups and the total conference's synthesis of the major insights that come from them. He emphasized that (1) every voice needs to be heard, (2) we need to look for common and complementary themes, and (3) all of these conversations need to be grounded in prayer.

Vernon Maddox came to lead the SPC in an initial time of prayer for the week's work. He recognized the Grace Place congregation of Hermitage, Tennessee, that is undergirding these activities with prayer while we are in process. He asked the group to divide into gatherings of two or three, and for each group to pray:

- That God will show up and reveal his will, and that we will recognize it.
- To give thanks and praise to God for what he is going to do, and for us to give him all the glory.
- For wisdom and courage to carry out what we decide to do.

John Tibbs led the group in worship before a break.

Dr. Ronald Fowler addressed the central question, "How can the Church of God move forward within this decade to bring glory to God and expand the Kingdom?" He emphasized the need for cooperation and cohesiveness, stating that the tasks before the church are so large that they will require the commitment of the entire Body to accomplish them. He identified six issues:

- Vision. What do we yearn to be and do, and what lessons are buried in our history that will help us figure this out? If we're not a reformation movement, what are we?
- Governance. What systemic changes are needed in order to assist our congregations and organizations to effectively fulfill their mission? How do we give them sufficient authority?
- Mission. What need(s) exist within the human family for which we as a movement are most gifted to address?
- Clergy Isolation. What do we owe each other in the ministry? How can we renew a sense of accountability and common ministry?

- Ministerial Exclusiveness. We will not do anything very significant until we find a way to position women to be able to use their spiritual gifts and fulfill their ministerial calling.
- Reflectiveness. What is the proper relationship between emotional fervor and theological reflection? We need writers who are capable of helping the church think about its faith. We need an educated ministry.

Pastor Matt Anderson of Scottsdale, Arizona, also addressed the central question. He said that every vision must be grounded in reality, and we as a movement must come to grips with the reality in which we live. He cited business writer Seth Godin's observation that a movement consists of:

- A story. Ours is the story of redemption.
- A connection between the tribe and its leader(s). We have a disconnect here; a lack of trust between leadership and the tribe. We have circles of help around the country that could begin leading the church, if we flatten our structure.
- Something that needs to be done. The Church of God began with a group of people who sensed the need for unity among Christians and the need for holy living. A gulf is widening between conservatism and liberalism; can we help to bridge that gulf?

Ray Rood then dismissed the meeting to break-out groups to discuss the central strategic question with these instructions:

The main purpose of this session is to help groups connect on a personal level.

1. Introductions (Everyone has one-two minutes.)
 - a. What is your name?
 - b. Where are you from?
 - c. Tell us about your family.
 - d. What is your vocation and/or ministry?
2. What are your hopes and expectations for the conference?
3. When you picture the church in ten years, what would you like to see?

General Session 2: 9:00 AM–12:00 NOON on Wednesday, September 14

Leo Flores led the assembly in worship.

Dr. Milton Grannum addressed the question, "How can we help our churches live out our Strategic Values?" He emphasized, "Without clarity and appropriate tools, people cannot run with a vision or task that requires and creates personal transformation." He examined President Kennedy's challenge of May 1961 to fly a man to the moon and bring him

safely home. Kennedy said, “I believe we possess all the resources and the talents necessary. But we have never made the national decision or marshaled the national resources required for such leadership.”

Dr. Grannum said, “The Great Commission has never been part of our DNA as a movement.” Therefore, he believed we must challenge the church to capture four things:

1. The truth of their faith.
2. The power of each person’s call and anointing.
3. The importance of each member’s involvement in making disciples.
4. The effectiveness of their ministry tools.

He said, “The right mission and the right tools reinforce both clarity and capacity.”

Dr. Andy Stephenson reminded the group of the process to be followed today. He said that we tend to focus on our weaknesses and negative trends within the church. He challenged the break-out groups to focus on the movement’s strengths and, when we bring a problem or negative observation to the discussion, to bring with it a positive proposal for change. “The SPC is not about preserving the way things are,” he said. Citing the Five Strategic Goals that came out of the 2006 SPC, he noted that these were all basic biblical principles, but we humanly tend to drift off those targets. He noted that these “Goals” are now called “Values” because they are changeless, even though our goals and strategies may change. He said, “The essential purpose of this SPC is to answer the question, ‘What can we do together?’ Not, ‘What are our problems or obstacles or weaknesses?’”

Ray Rood said that very few organizations have operationalized their values. “You are unique in this application. You have operationalized your values by identifying tools that enable the church to live out its values.” He cited the “Focus 40” Lenten emphasis as a good example. He also said that today’s break-out discussions should focus on, “What can we do?” These ideas will be given to the Transformation Teams, which can use them to implement the Five Strategic Values.

The assembly adjourned into its thirteen break-out groups to address the question, “How can we help our churches live out our Strategic Values?” Each group was asked to consider the Strategic Values in light of these questions:

1. Ignite! How can we as the Church of God help individuals in our churches live out the Great Commission in their everyday lives? What ideas, resources, or training would be helpful for pastors, leaders, or individuals in our churches?
2. Permeate! How can we as the Church of God help individuals in our churches live out the Great Commandment? What ideas, resources, or training would be helpful for pastors, leaders, or individuals in our churches?

3. Free! How can we as the Church of God help individuals in our churches live in biblical stewardship? What ideas, resources, or training would be helpful for pastors, leaders, or individuals in our churches?
4. Cultivate! How can we as the Church of God help individuals in our churches nurture their spiritual gifts? What ideas, resources, or training would be helpful for pastors, leaders, or individuals in our churches?
5. Refresh! How can we as the Church of God help individuals in our church connect more with others and with God? What ideas, resources, or training would be helpful for pastors, leaders, or individuals in our churches?

The assembly reconvened at 11:30 AM to hear reports from the break-out groups.

General Session 3: 1:30–4:30 PM on Wednesday, September 14

Dr. Andy Stephenson introduced Dr. Andrea Cook, president of Warner Pacific College, to address the question: “How can we best develop our future, emerging and experienced leaders in and through our churches, colleges, state assemblies, mentoring resources and other means?”

Dr. Cook said that she fears we spend too much of our time comparing ourselves to other movements and denominations, rather than focusing on our mission and appreciating one another. “We fail to live with authenticity into the clear strengths that God has for us.” She called for the movement to develop its “theology of place,” to appreciate our unique calling and identity.

She recalled how WPC had to recall its mission to be an urban college, because it had become rather insular and aspiring to move to the suburbs. Risk aversion had caused the institution to avoid grappling with its most serious challenges and opportunities. They took three steps:

1. Strategic change requires a leader to embrace a godly sense of urgency.
2. Strategic change requires a leader to establish a guiding coalition.
3. Strategic change requires a leader to empower broad-based action.

She said we need “a farmer-like mentality to strategically till the soil.” What defines our godly sense of urgency? How are we building a guiding coalition nationally and locally? What are we guiding others toward? Do we have the right tools?

Before the breakout groups departed, Dr. Duncan asked the group to think about: What is your image of hearing from God? He said that the planners of this conference have prayed by faith that God would speak to us when we gathered. Already there is a sense of focus of what God has revealed this meeting, especially our need to make the Great Commission and the Great Commandments a primary focus of the movement’s efforts.

He then led the group in a time of praising and thanking God for what he has already done in our midst.

Ray Rood said that the break-out discussions this afternoon would focus on how to develop the leadership to carry out the vision that God has laid on our hearts.

The assembly adjourned into its thirteen break-out groups to address the question of identifying, developing, and nurturing leaders within the church. Each group was asked to consider these questions:

1. What are some ways we as the Church of God can help grow the emerging leaders who feel a call to full-time ministry/missions?
2. How can we as the Church of God help grow our lay leaders in our churches?
3. What are some ways we as the Church of God can help grow our leaders who are our pastors?
4. Would there be different methods according to age (i.e., 20–30, 30–45, 46–60, 60+), or would it be the same across the board? If different according to age ranges, what would that look like?
5. What are some ways we can help grow the emerging leaders who feel a call to live out their calling in a role other than full-time ministry (i.e., other professions such as the medical field, business field, etc.)?
6. If you could choose only one group to start to focus on, which group would be your first priority? Emerging leaders who are called to full-time ministry/missions? Or emerging leaders called to live out their faith outside a church role as lay leaders or pastors?

The assembly reconvened at 3:40 PM to hear reports from the break-out groups. The conference adjourned at 4:30 PM for dinner.

General Session 4: 7:00–9:30 PM on Wednesday, September 14

The conference reconvened at 7:00 PM with worship led by John Tibbs.

Dr. George Bullard brought a presentation on “Structures for Effective Strategy Fulfillment.” He said, “Denominations will continue to exist, but will they continue to be relevant to the congregations that they claim to serve?” He shared his observations as an outsider:

- The Church of God (Anderson) is a denomination. It doesn’t matter whether you call yourself one, but recognizing this fact does enable you to learn from the experience of other denominations.

- Congregational movements are like a CLOUD, while denominations are like a BOX. At some point, the BOX seeks to contain the CLOUD, but the CLOUD will not be contained within it.
- The CLOUD is constantly moving and changing, while the BOX is often at rest, but trying to figure out how it can catch up with the CLOUD.
- However, the CLOUD needs some type of BOX to sustain it; the BOX needs to regularly change its shape and position to keep up with the CLOUD.
- He shared an illustration of the linkage between vision, relationships, programs, and management of the denomination. Vision and relationships walk by faith, while programs and management walk by sight. Because this is an organic system, vision will occasionally get tired and retire from leadership; but where there is no vision, management drives the organism. This happens regularly in any congregation or institution. Yet leadership is reluctant to hand control of the vehicle back to vision. Eventually, the congregation or denomination walks by sight and not by faith.
- He shared these things he has seen at SPC this week:
 - Signs of health and strength:
 - “Transforming Culture.”
 - High value for relationships and fellowship. [Relationships are critical in the early 21st century.]
 - High value for worship, prayer, and biblical foundation.
 - High expectations.
 - Commitment to diversity.
 - Collaboration.
 - Resources focused on the local church.
 - Focus on connectivity and cohesion.
 - The valuing of our identity as a “movement.”
 - Challenges:
 - Wisdom and courage to take action. (This is a common challenge in church transformational efforts. Because we lack the wisdom

and courage to act, crises and interruptions have a greater effect than otherwise would be true.)

- Brokering resources needed by a wide diversity of local congregations. It's not possible for you to provide the resources that all of your congregations need, so you must become a broker of resources (from outside) that fit the needs of your people.
 - Flattening structures around which people have already built high cultural and strategic expectations. (A typical response is to rally people to try to maintain the outmoded structure so that we don't lose our jobs or positions.)
 - Autonomy, isolation, fragmentation.
 - Bureaucratic language is too often used, but a movement requires the use of organic language.
 - Though the Church of God wants to be a movement, its people keep asking for more centralized services.
 - The Church of God is not sure what unique thing God has called it to do. Therefore, it's not sure what structure or governance patterns will empower that, without controlling it.
 - Church of God people need to be captivated by our unique mission that only God can accomplish through this movement.
- Suggestions
- If you're truly a movement, then no particular structure is essential for your continuation.
 - You currently have a three-dimensional structure (national, state, and local). This is typical of any denomination. However, congregations will no longer support this structure unless they are convinced of the unique value of each dimension. (In many denominations, one dimension is disappearing because it is not perceived to add value.)
 - Move from the mindset that (a) *money follows mission* to (b) *money follows information* to (c) *money follows relationships*. Laypersons say, "I will give to you if I have a relationship with you, if I know your story in an intimate way."

- There are three basic types of denominations: (a) centralized, (b) decentralized, or (c) distributive or networked. The future lies with the distributive or networked structure.
 - A networked denomination has spiritual value connections, storytelling connectors, and relationship connectors. It also has missional nodes (specific ministries) and correlating nodes (e.g., CGM and state assemblies).
 - Networked denominations broker resources more than they provide resources. They collaborate with other denominations and parachurch orgs to broker these resources. Dr. Bullard said, “If you cannot serve all congregations, then you give up your right to serve any congregations. But you do not serve all congregations in the same way.”
- Questions
 - How can we best organize ourselves for ministry?
 - What new or renewed structures need to be considered? Dr. Bullard said, “You need both the CLOUD and the BOX, but strategy must come before structure.”

The conference broke into its break-out groups for discussion at 8:00 PM, with the following instructions:

It is important not to assume that current structures are sacred. The mission is sacred; the structure is not. Strategy should significantly inform structure. Therefore, do not assume geographically based structures or just consider how to make changes in our structure. Assume the strategy is so empowering that current structures may not be adequate. Be bold! Anything less than bold is inadequate in a time of movement transformation.

1. How do numerous changes inside of ministry require rethinking on how best the delivery of ministry services to our constituents can be accomplished?
2. What enablers for ministry need to be established? What present structures that seem to empower the strategy of the movement need to be enhanced and emphasized, and further challenged to lead?
3. What are some barriers to ministry that need to be removed? What hinderances keep us from moving forward?

The conference reconvened at 9:00 PM, at which time recorders brought brief reports of the break-out discussions.

General Session 5: 9:00 AM–12:00 NOON on Thursday, September 15

Ray Rood reminded the conference that the SPC process began a year ago with several leadership group discussions around the country, which developed a list of strategic questions. The SPC Committee then selected from these a list of core questions for these days. Invitations were sent to everyone in attendance, with a request for any comment or feedback on these questions prior to the meeting. He said the SPC meeting itself had been an opportunity to reflect on where the Church of God is and where it needs to go for the next four to five years. The thirteen break-out groups then met to discuss these final questions:

1. What are the key thoughts, surprises, or learnings we take away from this time together?
2. What still needs to be addressed?
3. What are our concluding recommendations? To whom?
4. What did I learn and what am I going to do with what I learned?

When the conference reconvened, all of the groups reported a sense of joy, thankfulness, and satisfaction in the outcomes of this meeting. They also emphasized:

- The need for national leadership to move quickly in implementing the objectives that emerge from this SPC.
- The need for regular reporting to the SPC participants on our progress toward achieving these objectives.
- The need for additional gatherings that draw in church leaders who are not present here (esp. the pastors of large congregations and young leaders who are not currently engaged in national planning) to review, refine, and reenergize the church's pursuit of these objectives.

Dr. George Bullard presented his final observations about the SPC experience. Dr. Bullard emphasized the need to identify (a) leading-edge congregations, (b) transforming congregations, (c) congregations that need transforming, and (d) support congregations. Leadership tends to spend most resources on the last category, the group that is least likely to change and survive. He said, "Structure before strategy is walking by sight. The primary outcome of denominational restructuring is preparation for the next restructuring... Many denominations have restructured in hopes of revitalizing themselves—and it does not work."

Dr. Ronald Duncan shared his thanks for the participants who took part in the SPC. He said, "I want to do everything I can to empower the church for transformative change." He noted the following:

"Macro Hearings":

- *GC Squared* (Great Commission x Great Commandments): “When we recommit ourselves to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandments, God blesses the church.”
- *Discipleship and Leadership*: “Passionate leadership is the outcome of intentional discipleship. We need to invest generously in training our future leaders.”
- *Covenant*: “Without covenant, we lack meaningful connection with one another. As Dr. Fowler put it, ‘What do I owe you and what do you owe me?’”
- *Resources and Tools*: “We need appropriate resources to equip and empower people for ministry. How do we identify them and make them widely accessible?”
- *The Imperative of Relationships*: “Our ability to reach out to others can enable us to change the world. However, we have not been very good at relating to folks within our ‘tribe’ who think and act differently than we do.”
- *A Compelling Vision*: “For me, this vision must have two components: (a) being together and uniting together in discerning the vision, and (b) articulating and communicating the vision with clarity and transparency.”

Next Steps:

- Transformation Teams will meet in mid-October to review the outcomes of this meeting and consider how they relate to the Five Strategic Values, as well as how to implement and communicate them.
- Focus 40 enrollment packets will be sent out in mid-November and resources will be available for free download in January 2012, toward a forty-day prayer focus on those who don’t know Christ with a God-sized goal to see 25,000 people come to Christ in 2012. Discipleship resources will be made available to help local congregations nurture these new converts in growing to become like Christ. NEXT STEPS will be available after Focus 40 to help disciple new believers and help individuals learn how to share their faith.
- CGM staff will review how the resources of CGM can be aligned with the outcomes of SPC, including the establishment of a new staff position focused on GC² (Great Commission and Great Commandment) to coordinate this.

Postscript from Dr. Duncan: Upon further reflection, I asked RPO Chairman Ken Weidrick and Ministries Council Chairman Randall Spence to take two additional steps. These are under active consideration:

- *At their January 2012 meeting, the Regional Pastors and Overseers will be asked to engage with the outcomes of the SPC.*

- *At their March 2012 meeting, the Ministries Council will be asked to review these recommendations for further implementation steps—e.g., whether any CGM ends policies should be revised in light of these discussions.*

Ongoing Concerns:

- Networking
- Roles of Leaders
- Alignment of CGM Resources

Dr. Duncan reminded the conference that the previous SPC had taken the theme verse of Isaiah 60:1—“Arise my people! Let your light shine for all nations to see! For the glory of the Lord is shining through you.” He challenged participants to keep this prophetic declaration before them as they step into the future.

Leo Flores, Dr. Andy Stephenson, and Dr. Duncan, led in closing worship. Each conference attendee received a ceramic coaster as a “stone of remembrance” for this event (cf. Josh 4). Dr. Grannum suggested that we write GC² on them to remind us of this central insight, so each person was invited to say, “I commit to GC²” upon receiving the ceramic disc.

Conference Evaluation: 1:00–2:00 PM on Thursday, September 15

After lunch, members of the Ministries Council, the SPC Planning Committee, and on-site members of the CGM staff met to evaluate the conference just concluded. Several expressed their opinion that the experience had been constructive, but they also shared some apprehension about the challenges that lay ahead for the General Director and staff of CGM.

Ray Rood reminded the group of the difference between *dialogue* (sharing various viewpoints and ideas, while brainstorming about a problem or opportunity) and *discussion* (conversation about practical steps that need to be taken in light of the brainstorming). He said the SPC has been a healthy time of intensive dialogue. Now the Ministries Council and Transformation Teams must engage in serious discussion to implement the insights we’ve gained here.

The group closed its review session by gathering around Dr. Duncan and laying hands on him, to pray that God will guide and strengthen him for the work that lies ahead.

Prepared by Joe Allison
Conference Recording Secretary