

## A Word from the General Director:

As most of you are aware, the Ministries Council of the Church of God conducts a visioning and strategic planning conference every five years. The 2011 Strategic Planning Conference (SPC) was held September 13 – 16 in Nashville, Tennessee. During that time, one hundred thirty-two participants gathered to hear from God and one another, to dialogue about significant questions and issues facing the church, to allow the Holy Spirit to bring forth ideas for discussion, reflection, and to advance the church toward transformational change. Many of these were new voices, as nearly half of those attending had not previously participated in a visioning and strategic planning conference for the national Church of God movement.

Massive prayer efforts undergirded the selection and work of those who participated. We gained valuable input from nine leadership rallies across the country in 2010 and 2011 that helped to shape the conference agenda. Two external consultants helped to facilitate the process, and shared their external views to further stimulate the dialog. Another critical factor was the work of the Church of God Ministries staff and the conference planning committee, who committed themselves to ensuring that the participants reflected our diversity. Together these individuals invested hundreds of hours to finalize the plans.

Prior to attending the SPC, participants were asked to read the late Dr. Gilbert Stafford's book, "Signals at the Crossroads" to engage their thinking. Featured speakers approached a single, over-arching question – How can the Church of God move forward within this decade to bring glory to God and expand the Kingdom? They challenged us to consider our responsibility, our call to action, our connection, and our mission DNA. This was followed by focus group discussions, during which each of the thirteen groups examined specific questions and identified three consensus responses to be shared in the general session.

All were engaged in a positive spirit, illustrating the body of Christ, with hearts and minds open to differing ideas, but each with a voice worthy of being heard. The dynamic synergy of these hours spent together produced outcomes that will inform the steps of the Ministries Council and Church of God Ministries. More importantly, these outcomes will engage the broader church as we seek the will of God together. On the final day of the SPC, I shared my initial "Macro Hearings" with those in attendance, and I wish to share them with you here today, along with additional reflections on important next steps:

**GC<sup>2</sup>** - From the first day, the Holy Spirit led more than half of the thirteen groups to identify the need for the Church of God to be more intentionally focused on the Great Commission and the Great Commandments. Though the 2006 conference lifted these two central values up, this year's participants expressed a belief that these have not yet been incorporated in our DNA as a movement. The Great Commission and the Great Commandments captivated and motivated our time together, as discussion centered on this one united framework for the future of the Church of God. In my closing remarks, I used the term "GC<sup>2</sup>" as a way to illustrate this renewed emphasis—growing the body of Christ exponentially by introducing persons to Jesus. This must be our prime directive. GC<sup>2</sup> allows us to define everything we do afresh. It becomes the prism through which we evaluate all other things.

***Discipleship and Leadership*** – Passionate leadership is the outcome of intentional discipleship. Within the framework of GC<sup>2</sup>, we are challenged to make more and better disciples for Christ. In order to ensure future generations of leadership in the Church of God, we need to be serious in the education, mentoring, and discipleship of young leaders. I was greatly encouraged by the presence of some of our new, young leaders at the conference, and their contributions were significant; their voices were invaluable. We can never make too great an investment in their future, because it represents our future as the church body. There have always been Joshuas following the Moseses. What is God calling us to do through the lens of GC<sup>2</sup>?

***Covenant relationship*** – A wholehearted commitment to GC<sup>2</sup> requires every member of the body of Christ to be united and to enter into covenant with one another. We enter into a covenant to affirm our accountability and responsibility to one another. In other words, “What do I owe you and what do you owe me?” Our covenant of ministry must also affirm our mutual trust. “What do I need from you and what do you need from me?” We enter into covenant to renew our confidence in the idea that we are stronger together. What are we willing to commit to the movement and to the body of Christ to accomplish the will of God?

***Resources for ministry*** – To empower people for the work of GC<sup>2</sup>, the church needs to equip them with the right resources for ministry. As a portion of their responsibility in recommending resources to the church at large, members of our transformation team are facing two challenges: (1) “How do we effectively match the right resources with the needs?”, and (2) “How do we make these resources accessible to all?” These tasks further illustrate the importance of our connectivity – connecting to one another to share insight and information, and connecting our knowledge to the work of GC<sup>2</sup>—fulfilling the Great Commission and Great Commandments.

***Imperative of relationships*** – In order to go about our Father’s business, we must build our internal connection of mutual respect, trust, and understanding. We have much to do to restore and revitalize the relationships that connect and sustain the Church of God. We need to get better at listening to all voices, relating to those within the movement who think differently, and embracing new ideas. Then, and only then, can we see God’s plan at work in the lives of multitudes that are coming to know Christ.

Finally, ***Compelling Vision*** – As I see it, our vision must compel us to unite together in service to Christ. II Corinthians 5:14 says, “For Christ’s love compels us...” (NIV) There is no higher call to action than that which we have received from Christ. His love compels us, equips us, and empowers us to do what is needed. Do we have the courage to go forward? All of this must be done through the prism of GC<sup>2</sup>.

So, on the heels of the Strategic Planning Conference, we ask the question, “What now?” Our next steps are many, in order for us to maximize the learning from this endeavor. This will continue to evolve and be revealed over the next five years, but the immediate steps I have identified are these:

1. The executive summary and minutes from the SPC will be made available to the total church for review, inspiration, and direction.
2. Church of God Ministries staff will begin to review all we are doing and all we plan to do through the prism of GC<sup>2</sup>.
3. The Ministries Council will use the data in reviewing the ends policies they have already developed.
4. Additional reports will be shared with specific groups for their interaction and potential follow up, including all endorsed and affiliated agencies, regional pastors and overseers, and partners in ministry.
5. Transformational Teams will meet in mid-October to review the outcomes of this meeting and consider how they relate to the 5 Strategic Values, as well as how to implement and communicate them.
6. Focus 40 enrollment packets will be sent out in mid-November and resources will be available for free download in January 2012, toward the objective of leading 25,000 people to Christ next year. Discipleship resources will be made available to help local congregations nurture these new converts in growing to become like Christ.
7. CGM staff will review how the resources of CGM can be aligned with the outcomes of SPC, including the review of staff assignments.

Throughout the ages, God has used solemn assemblies to help his people refocus and refine what he desires for them to do to live out his will. I am committed in my life and ministerial career to walk faithfully with what God has given through this SPC. I encourage you to join me in this walk.