

## **Questions and Answers**

### Related to the 2006 Plan for United Cooperation

#### **1. Why do we need a statement of belief?**

The use of belief statements can be both positive and negative, but our heritage tends to focus on the negative. We must remember the cultural derivation of some of these past teachings. This sincere posture seems derived from times past when religious America was so convicted about numerous issues and matters of opinions that people divided over trivial points and elevated them to matters of salvation. At its inception, the Restoration Movement took on creedalism by rightly championing the Bible as the ultimate authority. We hold, however, that an early-on posture of suspicion about all things written has become a significant liability in this postmodern, stand-for-little world. Many more of us fear the consequences of not stating our convictions than we do the consequences of putting them in writing. Many brothers and sisters are also wondering where different congregations stand on specific issues of practice and doctrines. While no one is suggesting a creed, we are advocating a break from the anti-statement thinking and encouraging our churches to be consistent and clear on their most pertinent convictions. To help with this, we have included statements that are in agreement with our shared beliefs. The following reasons indicate why we advocate such statements:

1. The apostolic church and succeeding generations expressed core convictions whenever it was called for.
2. We live in a time that requires greater clarity, and the anti-creedal DNA of our heritage actually makes it harder for us to stand for something in this age.
3. Others will misrepresent us if we do not represent ourselves.
4. Declaring our convictions in advance hinders those of hidden belief systems from rising up in times of uncertainty.
5. The consensus among our fellowship is for us to stand together for greater truths and cherished values and to express them honestly.

#### **2. What exactly are you asking us to sign up for?**

We are simply calling for those churches that are unified on the statement of beliefs, general practices and connections to begin the process of functioning as a stronger and more unified brotherhood.

#### **3. Do you have a plan for meeting needs and challenges that go beyond a church's regional grouping?**

Yes. Each regional group will send representatives to resolve those needs and challenges that will arise (through prayer, Bible study and discussion). A chairman and an agenda committee would be selected by those representatives to serve in that capacity for a period of two years. This

committee would organize and prioritize the ideas and concerns and facilitate the coordination of smaller subcommittees that would then make presentations to the general assembly.

**4. How would those needs and challenges be put on the agenda?**

Any representative from a participating church may submit a proposal to the Agenda Committee. Currently so many needs have gone overlooked or been neglected that it will take some time for this group to catch up, so to speak.

**5. What if a church decides later to join or not participate?**

The door should never be closed for a church to later join or withdraw their association at any time for any reason.

**6. How should those churches be treated that choose not to sign up?**

There may be many different reasons why some churches may not sign up. They are still our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we need to continue to respect, love, and cherish one another in the Lord.

**7. Would our church ever be coerced to give up leaders, people, or money to other churches or mission efforts?**

No. These coercive practices are not respectful, loving, or considerate and must never be tolerated. Great respect and love must be freely given between congregations that both give and receive training and input.

**8. Would churches ever be required to give a specific amount to missions support?**

No, we do not believe that any amount should ever be given under compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7). Certainly appeals would be made as needs come up, strategies are formed and consensus is built.

**9. Does our commitment of the older women training the younger women mean that the women must be paid staff?**

No. Although that may be preferred and encouraged, the commitment is not one of compensation, but believing that women have a God-given ministry with other women--one of training, counseling, and studying with other women.

**10. Does "remembering the poor" mean that our church must give to a particular charity such as HOPE Worldwide?**

Not necessarily. While we encourage our churches to remember the poor around the world and appreciate the tremendous impact of HOPE

Worldwide, those decisions remain with the leadership of the local congregations.

**11. Are you saying that this fellowship is against members being romantically involved with and marrying non-Christians?**

Yes, because God has made it clear that he is against it.

**12. What if our church supports most of the shared beliefs, but not all? Should our church still ratify this plan?**

No. That would be problematic and even nullify the purposes of having a plan. Many Protestant denominations could state that they agree with most of these shared beliefs. Part of the purpose of this proposal is to recognize those congregations that still share these long-held beliefs and convictions and are committed to carrying the gospel message to every person in every nation.

**13. What if we cannot meet the deadline of April 3rd?**

The April 3rd date is not a deadline, but rather the date that we will begin to publish those churches that affirm this plan. This list will be updated regularly to reflect those churches that wish to be added.

**14. Why is the document so long?**

There are some that would have preferred a shorter document, but there are others that appreciate the efforts that we made to provide more explanation.

**15. I'm not sure which region our church would be a part of. Do we have a choice?**

Yes, but it is recommended that each church consider the geographical region you are near. However, each church would make the final decision in each case.

**16. Can we have more regions than those listed?**

First of all, remember that one of the purposes behind gathering together within a region is to have a large enough group to provide synergy, powerful fellowship, and spiritual sharpening. That being said, there will probably be some large regions that will choose to meet sometimes all together and other times gather together in smaller sub-regions for practical reasons.

[The following three questions and answers were added on 30 March 06].  
--*Disciples Today Editor*

## **17. Why Didn't the Proposal Cover Our Relationship to the Mainline Churches?**

As brothers commissioned to propose a plan for cooperation and unity for our own congregations with a shared history in the 'discipling' movement, we did not feel the right or mandate to provide universal direction in this regard. Nor did we have sufficient resources to truly understand the wide variety of factors affecting these relations congregation to congregation, city to city and region to region. It would seem that individual members of Christ's church, as well as individual congregations, will believe or behave differently based on their own experiences, understanding, predispositions and local history. For sure, the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17 extends beyond our movement but it is important to remember, at the same time, that there has been much turmoil in the short history of Restoration churches (without even beginning to consider the scope of all Christendom), and that even among Restoration churches such a global proposal would require a level of dialogue that has not been realized for more than one hundred years. Swift shifts are occurring that require continued humility, wisdom and prayer so that we can see what God has planned for us locally or otherwise. Our mandate was for those who have been on the same historical journey together and share much of the same values and culture.

One related question that came was "Would we allow a congregation from outside of our historical fellowship to participate in this cooperation agreement?" The answer is "Yes, of course, assuming they concurred with the proposal and found a place in a regional group."

## **18. With our history how can we avoid stigmas of churches being lesser or greater, worse or better, inside or outside for those who don't affiliate or sign on at this time?**

We must continue to hold on to each other. We are trying to form a basis of cooperation after a period of lingering-not take anything away. We must continue to have full fellowship rights as brothers, forgiven through the blood of Christ. Please remember, the purpose of the united cooperation document is strengthening, greater unity, cooperation and pooling our resources along known publicly agreed upon values. In these times where authenticity and transparency are debated and valued we need a collective culture where no important elements are hidden. The document is meant to make ourselves as clear as possible but not introduce any innovations. If it takes a while for all of this to come together then we must patiently hold onto to each other through the means that we already have.

## **19. Already some have tried to compare this to our previous historical structure. What are the main similarities and differences?**

The main similarities are having publicly affirmed expectations for how our congregations will work together, as well as the shared 'priority' of full devotion to world missions and evangelism.

The differences are both real and profound because today we are building on a worldwide base of relationships and shared history - whereas twenty years ago our energy was being spent in the planning and laying of that foundation. Although most of the initial leaderships' structures were natural and organic, there came a moment when certain leadership roles became more 'positional' than functional (i.e., individuals were given responsibility for leading groups of people that they actually lacked the experience and ability to build). There are at least five differences from the previous model.

**First**, the previous order failed to recognize both the need and legitimacy of empowered local leaderships and therefore often promoted top down leadership appointments from a central location. This one, like the New Testament, enjoys having brothers (and sisters) personally commended by character, reputation and spiritual values to the various leadership roles. Previously overlooked strengths will rise to the surface in this healthier model (See Stimulating Healthy Interdependence). **Second**, for the consideration of global questions and concerns there will be greater representation coming from non-American churches whereas the previous model often depended on the deliberation of just a few individuals from a conspicuously American viewpoint. **Third**, in the past our few statements of our beliefs were more commonly focused on performance and practice verses like Luke 14:25-33, Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 2:38-41. Now we have a document that draws attention to the orderly way of first seeing the doctrines of God, then the Gospel, then our own response to God's message of salvation and lastly, our important practices. **Fourth**, we have patently avoided any sense of a fellowship that has a specially chosen "solitary" leader - this immature 'parental' stage was artificially prolonged to the exasperation of many. And **fifth**, we have expressed and maintained in many ways that the local congregations are to be governed locally and most forms of interdependence will be felt regionally. The global aspects of our interdependence will mostly take place on missions, seminars, plans for the poor, etc.