Overview and vision

After veteran minister and administrator Les McCullough opened the morning session with prayer, President Jim Franks welcomed over 220 pastors, elders and wives (representing 13 countries) to the ministerial conference in Richardson, Texas, just minutes from the new headquarters office facility in Allen, Texas. Since the meetings in Louisville, Kentucky, in January 2011 were essentially the formative steps of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, this conference gave the first chance for the ministry as a whole to review progress and see the future sketched in broad terms.

Mr. Franks presented an overview, first noting his attendance at the funeral of long-time Bahamian pastor Kingsley Mather early last week. Mr. Mather’s legacy—a passion for preaching the gospel—had clearly been indelibly etched in the minds of his family and friends.

Do we still have that passion for preaching the gospel and caring for the people of God? Mr. Franks noted the 40th anniversary of his and (COGWA risk manager and Fort Worth, Texas, pastor) Britton Taylor’s original hire into the full-time ministry. Many in the room share similar history. Times have changed. Organizations have changed. We have smaller groups. But this “work” has been going on for 2,000 years. Will we continue to be part of it?

Mr. Franks cited a powerful recent historical example. On Jan. 15, 2009, a US Airways flight took off from LaGuardia Airport in New York City, only to suffer a serious “bird strike” that crippled both engines. Captain “Sully” Sullenberger and crew safely brought the airliner down on the Hudson River, and all 155 on board were rescued!

National Transportation Safety Board examiners noted, “That guy [Sullenberger] has been training for this event his entire life.”

What about us—we who have served in the ministry of Jesus Christ for decades? What have we been prepared to do? We are veterans in this calling—where has it brought us?

The answer may not be clear in terms of specifics, but it surely is in broad terms. We know well the prophecy from Matthew 24:14 that the gospel must first be preached in the world as a witness before “the end” comes. Are we close to “the end”? Surely we would all say, “Yes!” But in a sense, the world entered “the end time” in Christ’s day. What are we yet to see?

Matthew 28:19-20 gives more familiar insight into our task: We are to care for God’s people; and once more, the message is to go to the world.

The apostle Paul felt it too—1 Corinthians 9:16 records his “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” cry. As he stated, it was a necessity “laid upon” him! It was his calling, his entrusted stewardship.
We are continuing the same task. Have we “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:13-14)?

Who among us knows what God will yet do? How do we know what the past 40 years of experience (more in some cases!) will yet be called on to supply? “If not now, when? If not us, who?”

We have been handed a tool that is unique in the history of humanity—the Internet. We have surely “suffered a while” (Peter’s words in 1 Peter 5:10). Are we, as Peter also instructed in verse 5, “clothed with humility”?

If we still have the passion for preaching the gospel and the compassion for caring for God’s people, who knows what yet lies ahead?

This gospel shall be preached—working together to do our part

Media operation manager Clyde Kilough introduced the next presentation, the first one of this conference to focus on the media opportunities open to us.

This date (June 11, 2012) marks the “launch” of the Church’s new website dedicated to the preaching of the gospel to the world.

Last January (2011), the churches had to be stabilized and organized. But even in those formative days, volunteers came forward to labor together to establish an Internet presence and communication vehicle. It has, and will be, our primary tool for communication (though not the only one). It can now serve as the primary vehicle for taking the gospel to the world.

The beginning of Christ’s public ministry, as outlined in Mark 1:15, contained four elements:

- The time is fulfilled.
- The Kingdom of God is (was) at hand.
- Repent.
- Believe (in) the gospel.

We must build on the same four elements. And we have three key words around which to organize our presentation:

- Life (2 Timothy 1:9-10).
- Hope (Colossians 1:23).
- Truth (Ephesians 1:13).

Tie them all together from Colossians 1:3-6, and we’re ready to “launch”!

Mr. Kilough then introduced three key collaborators in the website development—Brian Hegvold, Mary Ann Hegvold and Mark Croft. They are members in Houston, Texas, and own a web development company, 30 Degrees North. Mr. Hegvold described the factors that went into the graphics of the site design and layout. Mrs. Hegvold sketched out how we foresee our audience using the site and took us through several “looks” the site can present, depending on the access tools people utilize. Mr. Croft walked us through the various “silos” and pages, showing the website’s versatility and function.
Mr. Kilough then officially announced the launch of LifeHopeandTruth.com! He urged us to “remember how it looks today,” because it is yet in its infancy. We have much work to do, but this is an exciting beginning. And with God’s help, we are going to work together as much as we can to do our part.

**International presentation**

David Baker introduced a slide show compiled through the efforts of the international branches of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association.

He reminded us that approximately 50 percent of the membership of COGWA resides outside the United States!

The inspiring slide show that followed, an “update on our global family,” backed up that fact of our existence.

The enumeration of where our members live and work on this planet is extensive:

- **Oceania/Pacific**—Tonga, Fiji, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia.
- **Australia and Asia**—Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India.
- **Middle East**—Egypt, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait.
- **The United Kingdom**.
- **Canada**.
- **Latin America**—Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil.
- **The Caribbean**—Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Croix, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana.
- **The French work**—13 countries and territories in the Caribbean, Europe and Africa (including Mauritius).
- **Southern Africa**—South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana, Malawi.

The stories were heartwarming and—to a North American audience—humbling. The accounts of the faithfulness and zeal of our brethren around the world make us all take stock. They are a shining example to us all in so many ways.

Do we share the vision? We are *all* “strangers and pilgrims” on this earth—Hebrews 11:13.

Saul Langarica asked God’s dismissal from our morning session in prayer, and the conference attendees scattered for various smaller meetings, photographs and lunch.

—*Doug Johnson*