The PK Fellowship of the Evangelical Church
by
Kenneth H. Pohly

This account of the PK (preacher's kid) Fellowship of the Evangelical Church (hereinafter called the Fellowship) is a short story based on the larger history of a movement within the Evangelical Church that began with vigorous excitement but disappeared in quiet obscurity shortly after it began. Between its birth and death it attracted about 1,700 members, scattered throughout the United States, Canada, and at least China and Japan. Its disappearance remains a mystery. Perhaps this brief report will tap memories long forgotten (although there are not many of us remaining to remember) or arouse sufficient interest to pursue "the rest of the story."

I am not a PK and had never heard of the Fellowship until I received a telephone call from Rev. Paul Pfaltzgraff, a classmate from Evangelical Theological Seminary, Class of 1947. He told me that many years earlier he had received a box containing the records of the Fellowship. He had kept them for about 30 years because he is a PK and wanted to preserve them, but did not know what to do with them permanently. Recently it had occurred to him that the Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage at United Theological Seminary might want them. I assured him that this would be a proper place for them, and he sent them to me.

What makes this transaction important is that Pfaltzgraff had received the records from one of the sons of the late Bishop C. H. Stauffacher. This took place sometime between 1972-1977 when Pfaltzgraff was the pastor of Salem United Methodist (formerly Evangelical) Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where Bishop Stauffacher had once been pastor. Bishop Stauffacher was one of the founders of the Fellowship, and the box of records that I had just received had been found among the Bishop's possessions when he died in 1956. It is a small box and its contents are limited: six sets of minutes, eight letters, a four-page promotional brochure, two charter membership certificates, 147 pages of names and addresses representing the membership role, and three copies of a poem entitled "A Preacher's Kid." Based on a 1942 exchange of letters between the Fellowship's president, Edwin Frye, and its secretary, C. H. Stauffacher, these are all the records that exist. Even so, after studying them several times and compiling a detailed history based on these documents, an interesting story of the Fellowship emerged.

The year of origin for the Fellowship was 1934 in the midst of the Great Depression. Its inception, however, must have stretched back into the previous year. Evidence for this is a letter dated January 12, 1934, written by the Fellowship's president, to some prominent PKs in the Evangelical Church, announcing a new "movement in the making" and requesting permission to use their names as sponsors. The letter goes on to define the meaning of PK, to outline the purpose and requirements of the movement, to name the officers, to set forth conditions of membership, and to issue an invitation to join. Written in long-hand across the top are the words: "Form letter containing historical information." Its contents indicate much more preparatory work and decision-making than could have been accomplished in the 11 days preceding January 12. However, except when indicated otherwise, the information for this story carries the date of 1934.

The Fellowship was started unofficially by six members of the 15-member Executive Committee of the General Board of Missions. All six of them were Evangelical PKs. At some point, apparently in 1933, these six people met and initiated a movement designed to assuage some bad memories associated with their childhood. They felt that they had suffered painful discrimination: treated with "contempt" and
“scorn,” having “shrank” from their experience as PKs, treatment they called “derogatory” and “undignified.” Assuming that other PKs, estimated to number in the thousands, harbored similar feelings, these six decided to create an organization to convey the message that the term PK is a term of “distinction and honor not to be despised.”

The six founders called their movement a “fellowship.” To develop and support it they organized themselves into what they called an “officiary,” so arranged that each of them had an office. As though six were not enough, later they added a seventh person to be the treasurer. There is no explanation for this addition except that she was a PK (but apparently not of the Evangelical Church) and was the assistant to the treasurer in the Board of Missions. These seven officers designated themselves as the executive committee, although why this was needed is not clear. The officers were:

President .................... Dr. Edwin G. Frye
1st Vice President ......... Bishop John S. Stamm
2nd Vice President ........ Mrs. John Hobson
3rd Vice President .......... Miss Emma D. Messinger
Secretary ............. Dr. (later bishop) C. H. Stauffacher
Associate Secretary .......... Miss L. Ethel Spreng
Treasurer ............... Miss Mary C. Schmidt

Initially the Fellowship had remarkable success. According to the promotional brochure, the response to the January 12 letter was surprising and larger than expected. The respondents were men and women in a variety of professions, many of whom were distinguished in their fields—some making generous contributions to the new venture. It appears that all of them had given permission to be listed as sponsors. The description of a discriminatory PK childhood had obviously resonated with them. Encouraged by this affirmation, the officers held their first meeting on February 14 and proceeded to set a general meeting of PKs sometime in August.

At the next meeting of officers on July 19, Treasurer Mary Schmidt reported a total membership of 1,615. A Committee on Future Policy was approved to recommend plans for the Fellowship’s continuation. At the general meeting in August they reported the following eight recommendations that were approved by the group:

1. That the Fellowship be continued for purposes of mutual helpfulness and spiritual emphasis.
2. That this be regarded as a fellowship and not as another organization of the church.

Stauffacher reported that he was recruiting 25 PK representatives—one for each annual conference—to recruit and organize PK members in their conference. The Fellowship appeared to be alive, healthy, and well prepared for a significant future.

The Fellowship made several particular contributions to the Church as well as to its own members. One was that, while it targeted Evangelical PKs in particular, its invitation to membership was extended to an ecumenical audience. In this sense it mirrored a strong characteristic of its parent church. The Evangelical Church was an ecumenical denomination. In harmony with this, the invitation was extended to PKs associated with the Evangelical Church whose fathers may have served in another denomination, and PKs raised in the Evangelical Church but were at that time related to another denomination. Deceased children whose fathers might want to memorialize them through membership in the Fellowship could also be recognized. Its membership was also international in character. Canadians represented the USA/Canadian relationship of the Evangelical Church and there were Oriental members. At the 1936 general meeting of
the Fellowship, Bishop Stauffacher was asked to 
greet member PKs in his official visit to the 
missionary work of the denomination in China and 
Japan.

Another promising contribution was an action 
taken by the officers to develop a record of the 
occupational pursuits of PKs. The reason for this was 
to refute the myth that most PKs became either 
preachers or social misfits. There is no evidence this 
was ever done, probably because no one was 
assigned to do it. Rev. Samuel Baumgartner, a retired 
district superintendent, had become concerned about 
this allegation and had done voluntary research on 
the myth. It covered the Indiana Conference from 
1852-1930. His documented conclusion was that PKs 
had a good record, as good as non-PKs, and that the 
myth was false. Apparently this was not shared with 
the Fellowship’s members.

An especially positive aspect of the Fellowship 
was its attempt to emphasize the spiritual enrichment 
of home and family life. From its beginning this was 
a stated goal. It was intended that this should be one 
of the functions of the conference representatives. 
Unfortunately again, there is no report on record of 
the work of these representatives. What we do have is 
an e-mail from Paul Pfaltzgraf in response to my 
request for information about his experience as a 
member of the Fellowship. His memories, he said, 
are somewhat vague after these many years, but he 
recalls being with other PKs at Iowa Conference 
family events. He remembers meeting people who 
became life-long friends. (One of those, Paul’s 
college and seminary roommate, the late LeRoy 
Kearney, became my friend and classmate at ETS). 
Among Paul’s memories is that his father served as 
pastor under Bishop Stauffacher’s leadership and the 
spiritual quality of home and family was a strong 
emphasis of the Bishop. This was a major concern in 
Paul’s birth family and in his own family. The 
emphasis on the spiritual quality of home life had a 
positive effect on Paul’s children’s lives. Pfaltzgraff’s 
experience gives us a valuable, and our only, glimpse 
into what may be a story that could be told many 
times over. It is a great loss that there is no other 
information about the Fellowship’s influence. 
Attempts to find other PKs with memories of the 
Fellowship have not been successful to date.

In spite of these indications of health in the 
Fellowship, from the beginning signs of 
dysfunction appeared. Best visible in retrospect, there 
is no indication in the written record of an awareness 
of them at the time. The first sign was the way in 
which the Fellowship began. There is no date on the 
first general announcement of its existence, nor the 
promotional brochure sent with it, but we know that 
the information was sent sometime after February 14. 
By then it was an organized movement with officers, 
an executive committee, an elaborate but confusing 
purpose, membership requirements, a one-time 
joining fee (but the amount was not specified), a 
missionary debt-reduction project, a program 
representative from each annual conference, and a 
vague decision to hold a general meeting of members 
on an undetermined date six months hence. All this 
was in place before the general membership had 
anything to say about it.

The stated purpose of the general meeting was 
to discuss the future policy of the movement. One 
might expect the officers to use the six months prior 
to the meeting to make plans for it and to engage 
some additional members in the planning process, but 
they made no plans other than to set the date of the 
meeting for August 11. The officers did not meet 
again until July 19 when Frye and Stauffacher were 
instructed to invite the members to the meeting. This 
was the only notice the members received about the 
meeting, and it was authorized only three weeks prior 
to the event. There is no copy of the 
announcement/invitation to indicate when it was sent. 
To make matters worse, instead of appointing the 
important committees on nominations and future 
policy, they authorized the committees but postponed 
naming them until sometime before the general 
meeting. “Sometime” turned out to be August 9! That 
gave the committee members two days in which to 
organize and to do their work! It is hard to 
understand why the officers gave such little attention 
to the participation of general members in the 
formation task, but their initial approach set a pattern 
that was not helpful.

A second sign of dysfunction that threatened 
the Fellowship’s future was an outgrowth of the first 
sign: the general lack of access to leadership 
opportunities. One of the recommendations presented 
by the Committee on Future Policy to the general 
meeting was that the number of officers be reduced 
from seven to four. This was a wise decision because 
seven officers were not needed and were not utilized 
when available. A related recommendation, however, 
was more restrictive. It provided for the selection of 
officers to be limited to persons who could attend 
meetings at a minimum of time and expense. This 
meant that officers had to live in a particular 
geographical area or meet regularly as a result of 
other responsibilities. This ruled out many potential 
leaders. Thus, when the Committee on Nominations 
recommended that Frye, Stamm, Stauffacher, and 
Schmidt be re-elected, it was a logical choice. All of 
them were on the Executive Committee of the Board 
of Missions headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio.
Schmidt worked in the office of the Board, Stamm and Stauffacher traveled there regularly for meetings, and Frye’s office with the Board of Publications was in Cleveland. Minutes of the Fellowship indicate that meetings were always in Frye’s office. It was a convenient and economical arrangement. It was also the sign of a development, the implications of which the “about 150” members at the first general meeting were apparently unaware.

A related dysfunctional development that restricted leadership accessibility was the failure to build limited tenure of officers’ terms into its structure. Limited tenure was an arrangement that applied generally throughout the Evangelical Church, including bishops and district superintendents. Such a recommendation would have been appropriate because the Committee recommended changes in the number and in election requirements of its “officary.” It is strange that tenure limits were omitted since it was such a widespread practice in the denomination. Perhaps it was overlooked because the Committee was chaired by Bishop Stamm with Bishop Stauffacher and Dr. Frye as members, and the few other members might have been reluctant to make such a proposal. But Stauffacher and Frye could have made the recommendation. Not to do so was probably a mistake because it eliminated the possibility of fresh leadership with new ideas.

A third sign of dysfunction in the Fellowship was the decision by the officers to hold its general meeting in conjunction with another organization. When August was selected for the first general meeting, it was on the condition that the Board of Christian Education would provide a time-slot during its meeting on August 8-12, 1934. The evening meal hour on August 11 was selected. This decision was prompted by economic necessity. It was clear that a general gathering of members was necessary if the Fellowship was to be a viable organization, but it had no money with which to fund such an expensive event. The Fellowship was an unofficial organization without denominational support. Its only revenue was the members’ contributions upon joining, and that was committed to the debt-reduction project for the Board of Missions. The goodwill of the Board of Christian Education with its quadrennial convention appeared to be the perfect solution because in a small denomination like the Evangelical Church, a fairly large number of delegates would likely be members of the Fellowship.

It also created a major handicap. The only times available were meal times. The convention schedule preempted normal meeting times. Meal times, however, were limited by such necessities as eating, spirited conversations with distant but dear friends, and other “distractions.” Assuming a total of 90 minutes available once every four years, that is hardly enough time for a developing organization’s members to get acquainted, to bond as PKs, to develop an identity, and to conduct business. Add to that the limited time given to committees for preparation makes it difficult to see how the organization could be successful. It is understandable that there appears to have been inadequate discussion of issues raised by the committee reports.

The fourth sign of dysfunction in the Fellowship was the decision to exist as a fellowship and not as an organization. In the original letter introducing the Fellowship and in the promotional brochure, there is a striking mix in the use of these terms in reference to the Fellowship. For example, in the second paragraph of the brochure, the movement is called both an “organization in formation” and “a much-coveted fellowship.” The officers called it a fellowship in describing what they were seeking—a supportive community. In giving form and structure to make it a reality, however, they created an organization. All this seems to say that the officers did not distinguish between the two terms. Considering the record as a whole, it becomes clear that from the beginning, the terms “fellowship” and “organization” were synonyms for the members as well as for the officers.

This may appear to be a matter of semantics, but there is a significant difference between them. Organizations rely upon elected officers, minutes, membership rolls, maintenance of boundaries, accountability, records, and rules of order. Fellowships, on the other hand, utilize shared leadership, informal voluntary participation, freedom to change, and supportive relationships. Nothing in the record indicates that the officers or the members in general had any awareness or concerns about these differences. Something, we do not know what, caused the officers to vote at their July 19 meeting to make the clear point that the movement was a “fellowship” and not “another organization of the church.” This was picked up as recommendation Number 2 from the Committee on Future Policy made to the general meeting in August.

So without rationale, we have only what happened following the decision of the general meeting to accept recommendation Number 2, to attempt some understanding of the result of this action. According to the records, the officers met only one more time after the general meeting in August. That meeting took place on December 14, presumably to implement the final four recommendations of the Committee on Future Policy. Items 5 and 6 were disposed of by form letters. The
substantive program implications contained in Recommendations 7 and 8 were not addressed. This meeting adjourned with no plans for a future meeting, but to convene at the call of the Chair. Had they declined to organize programs because they were unclear of their responsibilities in a fellowship? If so, why had they initiated the change? Why had they accepted re-election? It is possible the officers were unclear as to their responsibilities in a fellowship. In any event, nothing happened with the two program proposals.

The fifth and final sign of dysfunction in the movement can be recognized only by asking why the Fellowship was started? A strong case was made initially in the January 12 and post-February 14 letters, and especially in the promotional brochure, that the Fellowship was a way of assuaging pain stemming from being born a PK. The founders felt victimized by this fact. It is interesting, however, that in spite of the passionate language used in describing the problem, this “injustice” was never mentioned again in the record! What was a key issue was the assessment of a membership “fee” for the benefit of reducing a debt held by the Missionary Society. Much of the space was taken in the record announcing this decision and justifying its existence. A strong feeling grows out of a thorough reading of the record that the real reason for creating the Fellowship was to assist the debt reduction problem in the Board of Missions. The fact is that the officers, all of whom worked for or were members of the Board’s Executive Committee, apparently never met again after the Fellowship completed its financial project for the Missionary Society at the end of 1934. Is it possible that the Fellowship was formed to help the Missionary Society financially? It is personally difficult for this writer to concede this possibility, but there is evidence for its conclusion.

Whatever the real purpose for the creation of the Fellowship, it was a movement in the Evangelical Church that deserves notice. For about a year it had a promising life. Within that year, 1934, with Americans still working to recover from the Great Depression, the movement attracted about 1,700 PKs to join and to contribute $3,100 to help a missionary cause that, according to the records we have, was never explained. Then the record ends—almost. Following the December 14, 1934, meeting of the officers, with an unfinished agenda, they left no Minutes to indicate they ever met again. But there are two other records. One is the membership roll. It is clear that the Fellowship continued to receive members through 1935 because every page in the membership roll is headed with the words: “1934-1935 Membership.” This could not happen without someone receiving and recording the names and money, and that responsibility had been assigned to Mary Schmidt. The record, however, shows no increase in members or contributions beyond the August 11, 1934, figures. The only other set of existing minutes are from the second General Meeting of the Fellowship on August 7, 1936. At this time the officers were still in place and functioning. The General Meeting was held at breakfast during the Convention of Christian Education and there were 125 PKs present. A committee recommended that the Fellowship continue. Two program goals: (1) fostering the Christian life in the home, and (2) encouraging meetings of the annual conference and local PK fellowships, were approved, but they were significantly different versions of the same two items the officers neglected to implement two years earlier. The officers were reelected and, with an announcement of Bishop Stauffacher’s official visit to the missionary work in the Orient, the meeting adjourned. With that, the Fellowship disappeared.

The Fellowship was not heard of again until the exchange of letters between President Frye and Secretary Stauffacher in 1942, mentioned above. The Bishop wrote to Dr. Frye with concern about the Fellowship. He did not have all of the records and thought Frye might have some. Frye sent what he had with the comment, quoted above, that those were all the records that existed. Stauffacher wrote:

As I have been thinking about this Fellowship, it seems to me that it ought to be stirred up again. I think we should have another dinner or breakfast at the General Convention of Christian Education or in connection with some other general gathering. I am not prepared to say we ought to start a new drive of some kind for some objective in the church, but at any rate it should not lie quiescent too long.

The ending of Stauffacher’s letter (the reference to “a new drive”) suggests that: (1) the missionary debt project had been central to the Fellowship’s existence; (2) the treatment of PKs was no longer a concern; and (3) sometime after the 1936 general meeting the Fellowship had gone out of operation. Stauffacher’s letter was written on October 22, 1942. Frye’s reply on November 6 is interesting. After mentioning some non-related items he says: “Regarding your suggestion as to further activities of the PKs, I shall be happy to discuss this with you and Bishop Stamm when we can be together again and have time for its consideration.” There is
no evidence such a discussion ever took place. The Fellowship was not mentioned again.

In the autumn of 1942 as the Frye-Stauffacher letters were exchanged, new developments in the Evangelical Church, growing out of a General Conference mandate, claimed the attention of the denomination. The author was engaged in one aspect of these developments as a representative of the Board of Missions. Pfaltzgraff was also involved representing the Board of Christian Education. In the subsequent work to achieve the General Conference mandate no mention was made of the Fellowship, although it would have been appropriate.

In retrospect it is difficult to see the primary reason for the creation of the Fellowship. Initially it appears to have been established to provide fellowship and support among PKs. A second purpose soon emerged and that was to honor preacher fathers or to provide a memorial to lost children. But the promotional brochure introduced another purpose—to fund a project to benefit an unexplained debt in the Missionary Society. This was justified expansively and effusively in the initial brochure and gives rise to the suspicion this might be the real reason for the creation of the fellowship. In any event it appears the officers were never committed to a single purpose or to any strategy for achieving these varied purposes.

Kenneth H. Pohly is Professor Emeritus at United Theological Seminary, and he is the founder of the Center for Supervision & Leadership Formation at UTS. He and his wife Marge live in Trotwood, Ohio.

Recollections of Dr. J. P. Landis

By

John J. Weaver

[Editor’s note: Shortly after the publication of the last issue, I received a copy of a note penned on a printed article titled “The Venerable John J. Weaver OBE.” In the article, Rev. Weaver was recounting his recollection of Dr. Landis, one of the founding faculty members of United Theological Seminary. Josiah P. Landis taught part-time at UTS from its opening to 1880 and then full-time until 1930—an incredible career of more than 60 years! He is considered one of “the four horsemen,” with Lewis Davis, G.A. Funkhouser, and A.W. Drury, of early UTS history. Below is the excerpt from the book Lighting a Candle: Kathleen Raine and Temenos followed by the handwritten note. There are few people still living who encountered J. P. Landis face to face.]

“I’m a 96-year old Anglican priest, living in Northern California, but when I was 12 years old I sat regularly in a pew of the United Brethren Church in Dayton, Ohio, where the Wright brothers were members. Near me sat an aged professor of Bonebrake Seminary [now UTS], named Landis. He took a liking to me, a little boy, and gave me a Hebrew Bible; then, over a period of a year and a half, he taught me to read the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis [Landis taught Hebrew and homiletics].

I still remember some of the Hebrew words but what most impressed me was learning that the spiritual, earthy Hebrews called God by many different names—I seem to remember that there were about 72 names. The one I remember now is ‘Elohim,’ which Landis further described as something like ‘mera-hwth,’ which he loosely translated as ‘a mother hen who sits on her eggs until they have hatched, then, with a watchful eye, protects them until they are ready to play freely in the barnyard.’ And so, Elohim is a feminine name for God, literally a creator mother hen who cares for her chicks until they are fully grown.”

My dear Dean, I spent my first 20 years at Euclid Avenue Church and . . . a Dr. Landis took a liking to me and taught me the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. Since then I was the Episcopal Rector of Trinity Church in Troy, Ohio; and then spent four years in the U.S. Army followed by 20 years as the Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in Detroit, Michigan. Then I moved my family and became dean of California with [name of the cathedral obscured].

I am grateful at 98 years of age to say that my background was in the United Brethren Church and they prepared me for my priestly ministry in the Episcopal Church. My fifth daughter, Sarah, is writing this note for me and I am eternally grateful for my Brethren heritage.

Faithfully, John Weaver
Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Hill, longtime member of the Advisory Council of The Center for the EUB Heritage, died on February 20, 2009, in Franklin, Indiana. A native of Covington, Ohio, Fred’s study at Miami (Ohio) University was interrupted by military service after which he received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from The Ohio State University. Upon the completion of a Master of Divinity degree at United Theological Seminary he began a long career as Professor of History at Indiana Central College, now the University of Indianapolis. During that span he completed a doctorate in history at Indiana University and became one of the most respected faculty members at the University of Indianapolis.

During Professor Hill’s seminary days, my Dad, George W. Frey, was one of his professors and Dad strongly encouraged Fred to accept the position at Indiana Central. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Hill became one of my professors, and he was one of the most influential teachers in my life. The fact that I chose a career as a history professor, concentrating in the same fields as Dr. Hill, is an indication of his influence on me.

Professor Hill was a meticulous researcher. His published history of the University of Indianapolis is a model institutional history. His class lectures were always exhaustively prepared, although years later he told me that in the Russian history course I took from him he was only one chapter ahead of us. It never appeared that way to me. As is typical in a small college, one must teach courses in unfamiliar areas. I later had the same experience in my career.

In retrospect, I can say that I probably modeled my teaching style as much after Professor Hill’s style as that of any other teacher I had. As members of the Advisory Council of the EUB Center, we saw each other frequently until the past year or two. Professor Hill’s death is a significant loss to me, but I am profoundly thankful that he was my teacher and friend.

Robert L. Frey

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Report from the Editor

On September 12-13, 2008, the conference sponsored by The Center for the EUB Heritage titled *Forty Years after Dallas: Retrieving the EUB Heritage for United Methodism* took place at United Theological Seminary in Dayton. Attended by more than 100 people, this conference featured the presentation of 12 papers on the history, doctrine and theology, and polity and practices of the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The concluding presentation tying all of these papers together was given by William J. Abraham (A.C. Outler, Professor of Wesleyan Studies at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University). It was a stimulating conference complete with excellent presentations, challenging questions, and warm fellowship among old friends and new acquaintances alike. Center Director, Jason Vickers, is currently editing the presentations given at this conference for publication. Further information on their publication will be given in the *Telescope-Messenger*.

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Many members of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History attended this conference, and the Commission held its sessions subsequent to the conference. On Saturday evening September 12, the Commission presented its Distinguished Service Award to Dr. K. James Stein, Professor Emeritus of Church History at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary. Dr. Stein is a longtime member of the Advisory Council of the Center for the EUB Heritage. After accepting the award, Dr. Stein gave a presentation titled “Mentors of My Ministry.” The next issue of the Telescope-Messenger will have the full text of his comments.

Since the last publication of the Telescope-Messenger I received a copy of a book edited by Anthony J. Farina and titled I Must, I Must, I Must: The Story of the Italian Evangelical Church of Wisconsin. The book was published by the Wisconsin Conference on Archives and History. For further information on obtaining a copy write to the Commission at 750 Windsor Street, Sun Prairie, WI 53590-0620 or contact it by e-mail at archives@wisconsinumc.org. This book contains an excellent account of the development of the Italian mission in Wisconsin.

Finally, at its meeting in October, 2008, the Advisory Council for the EUB Center approved a new dues structure as follows: Basic Membership-$20; Supporting Member-$50; Life Member-$500; Preservationist Level-$1,000 or more. This represents the first increase since dues were initiated in 1990. The membership form in the Summer issue of the Telescope-Messenger will reflect this new dues structure.

Robert Frey