

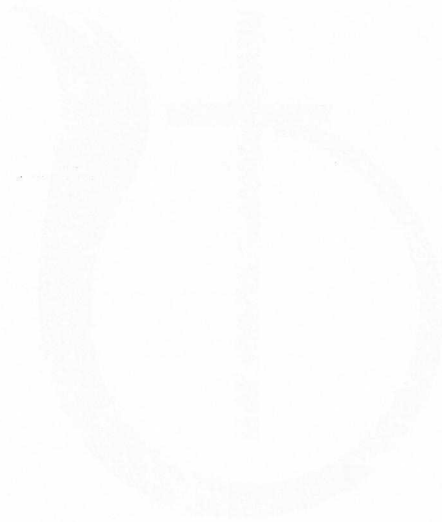
PART TWO

CHURCH OF GOD
HISTORY AND POLITY



EXHORTER

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EXHORTER

INTRODUCTION

THE STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH

To understand the structures of the Church of God, one needs to consider how those structures have developed. Much of what has been done through the years has been a response to the issues the Church was facing at the time. Since this movement had its start in the Appalachian Mountains of East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and North Georgia, its earliest response was to the rough frontier life of that region. Its founders preached a solid holiness message that has been important to the formation of the doctrine of the Church. In developing the structures of the Church, these pioneers were influenced not only by Biblical content but also by the way the government was organized and even by the structure of the railroad companies. Some patterns of centralization in the Church may be traced to all three influences. Understanding that the polity of the Church cannot be separated from its history is important.

THE CHURCH AS A MOVEMENT

In the beginning, the leaders of the Church of God never referred to the Church as a denomination. The earliest copies of the *General Assembly Minutes* indicate that the Church would never be a denomination. The term most commonly used in those days was movement. Often one would hear it said of a pastor, "He has one of the finest churches in the movement." One of the reasons R.G. Spurling Sr. moved out from the ritualism of the Baptist church he attended was to become part of this dynamic movement.

Likewise, there is no indication that every move of the Church was planned out or that they had a solution for each scenario. Instead, when a problem arose, the first thing they said was "Let's pray. Let's go to the Lord with this situation." Out of that kind of trust, the Church moved from stage to stage.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The Church as a movement is illustrated in the development of the General Assembly and the General Council. These bodies move progressively toward a desired goal. The circumstances under which they have worked systematically and as a polity have varied from time to time. The changes to match the times illustrate the Church as a movement. Other organizations have observed this and have expressed a desire to become a movement like the Church of God.

DOCTRINAL PURITY

While the Church has changed, and must change from time to time organizationally and structurally, it has remained consistent in its doctrine. In fact, it is very difficult to change anything doctrinally. It is much easier to bring about a change in polity than it is to bring about a change in

doctrine or in the Declaration of Faith. A proposed change in doctrine is required to be circulated well in advance of the General Assembly. If it passes when it is presented to the General Assembly, then it must be published in the *Church of God Evangel* and brought back to the next General Assembly. There the delegates will decide if they really want to make this change.

The Church learned the importance of doctrinal purity early in its history. In 1900, Spirit-filled believers were encouraged to seek the “holy dynamite,” the “holy lyddite,” and the “holy oxidite.” Supposedly these heretical teachings represented greater spiritual power. The existence of these teachings made the leaders of the Church understand the need for sound Biblical teaching in Sunday school and for the development of educational institutions. They recognized the importance of having a competent ministry.

THE CHURCH AS A DIVINE ORGANISM

Jesus told His disciples, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:19). This brings another dimension to the concept of the church. It is not only a human organization but also a divine organism. While Christ is speaking of the body of Christ, of which the Church of God is a part, some in the early days concluded that this movement was the church exclusively. Obviously, there was a downside to that. Eventually, the Church of God moved past that to develop a solid theology that is biblically sound.

The church did not originate because somebody said, “Let’s go out and start a church.” The church was in the heart and mind of God from eternity. The concept of the church is referred to in the Old Testament and developed in the New Testament. Paul addressed this issue when writing to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:3-6).

Some people feel they have no need to make a commitment to the church. As far as they are concerned, they can take it or leave it. But they forget that even the local body of believers is a group of divinely called-out ones. Besides, the Scripture clearly admonishes: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). After all, the church is a body, a living organism made up of connected tissue.

GOD AS THE CHOOSER

Some people do not feel a need to participate in the church because all the members are not perfect. But as someone has said, “You don’t really know a lot about the choosing of God by looking at the choosees.” To understand the process of God’s choosing, one needs to look at the heart

of the Chooser and at the mission to which He is calling His people—to reach humanity with the gospel. The heart of the Chooser has been there from the formative years of the Church of God as the people have encountered the real presence of God. The heart of God has also been evident in the mission of the church. Its primary purpose has been to draw humanity to the presence of God. No higher or more noble mission could be imagined. From its outset, the Church of God has been a mission-driven, purpose-motivated movement.

THE CHURCH AS A HUMAN ORGANIZATION

The church is God's plan. He does not have a plan B. Every minister working in a movement such as the Church of God needs to know how the organization works, because how it does its business says a lot about the organization. The basic reason for having polity and for following parliamentary procedure is to accomplish two things: to determine what the church ought to do and what it ought not to do. Other considerations include how a movement rewards its people, how it punishes the erring, what corrective measures it takes, and how it recognizes the rights of various constituencies.

THE RIGHT OF THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER

According to the *General Assembly Minutes*, any member of the Church of God from anywhere in the world who is 16 years of age and above who is present at the General Assembly and registers has the same voice in that Assembly as does the general overseer. This movement understands the importance of individuals having a right to speak and be heard. For example, a vast difference exists in how speakers are recognized when as many as 25,000 may be in attendance as compared to the first General Assembly where eight people were present. But the same principle is adhered to; that is, every person has a right to speak and to be heard.

Since the Church of God has a centralized form of government, members do not come to the General Assembly as delegates representing a local church. They speak only for themselves. This means that an individual from a church of ten members has the same rights and privileges as one from a church of 10,000 members.

POLITY RELATES TO HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Someone might ask, "What does polity have to do with my mission and my ministry? What does this have to do with my preaching the gospel? Is not my primary interest in reaching souls? Why should I need to be concerned about *Robert's Rules of Order* or the sergeant at arms?" But the issue is that the polity is a means to an end that has to do with the Church of God's history and theology. For instance, the individual from a ten-member church speaking on the same level with the individual from a 10,000-member church is one member of the body saying to another member of the body, "we need each other." That is an important part of Pauline theology. Following an organized approach to business is also a part of Paul's teachings. He wrote: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Rather than being a hindrance to mission and ministry, doing things orderly and having the proper structures in place enables one to fulfill the divine mission and to carry out one's God-called ministry. Conducting a successful ministry involves more than just preaching the gospel. For example, it involves knowing the Internal Revenue Service's reporting requirements for ministers and for a local church. It involves knowing what retirement plans are available for those committed to full-time ministry. Having a systematic approach to such mundane things as these is essential to successfully carrying out the larger mission and ministry of the church.

CHURCH OF GOD HISTORY

This section will consider the development of the Church of God from its earliest days through its most recent growth. As a supplement to this study, the reader is encouraged to read the official history of the Church of God, *Like a Mighty Army: The Definitive Edition*, by Charles W. Conn, D.D. This work offers a breadth of information about the Church. In his original research, Dr. Conn interviewed witnesses who experienced firsthand the events that comprise Church of God history.

While *Like a Mighty Army* is the official history of the Church of God, many scholars are continuing to research and write about the movement's past. Many of these works may be found at the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, housed in the Pentecostal Resource Center in Cleveland, Tennessee. Serious students should carefully consider all available scholarly materials related to the history of the Church.

Knowing the history of the Church is important. Joshua understood this principle even in his day. When God's people crossed the Jordan River, the Lord told them to build a monument out of 12 stones from the dry riverbed. The stones were to serve as a sign of what God had done. The Lord said to Israel: "When your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (Joshua 4:6, 7). When congregations inquire about why the Church of God is as it is today, an understanding of its history will reveal what God has done through the years.

In Revelation 12:11, the source of the believers' victory is recorded: "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." The Church has a corporate testimony just as individual believers have a personal testimony. God has done a great work through the Church of God, and knowing about its history enables constituents to share what He has wrought.

The Beginnings of the Church of God

The Church of God had its beginning in 1886 in a geographic area known as the Appalachian Mountains. These mountains lie among East Tennessee, North Georgia, and Western North Carolina. Life was difficult in the late 19th century in this region of the United States. Separated from the amenities of the city, families struggled for everyday survival with few sources of income. Many of the families were large and most were of Scottish-Irish descent. These rugged people were often distrustful of outsiders, proud of their self-sufficiency, hardworking, but even as today, they reflected the culture of the Appalachian mountain dwellers in their poverty. Those with religious convictions were fervent in their beliefs, predominantly following Baptist and Methodist traditions with a few independent congregations scattered across the mountains. The Methodists were generally regarded as the "educated" and "formal" of the region, while the Baptists were highly evangelistic and ardent in their worship. The religion of the mountains was as rugged as the inhabitants of the mountains, and adherents tended to be rigid in their traditions. Protracted meetings of evangelistic services stimulated some to search for a deeper relationship with God.

RICHARD SPURLING

In 1884, near the community of Coker Creek, in Monroe County, Tennessee, a Baptist preacher named Richard Spurling deeply desired to restore the simple faith of Jesus. He set out in prayer and the study of Scripture and church history to determine an answer to what he perceived was the “deadness” of some area churches. He appealed to churches for revival and reformation. Spurling made part of his living at building and operating gristmills—bivocational ministry was common for ministers in that region during that period. One of his gristmills was located on the banks of Barney Creek in Monroe County, Tennessee. On August 19, 1886, seven people covenanted together with Spurling and his son, R.G. Spurling Jr., to find the revival and spiritual life they found lacking in their churches. They had a vision for what they called the “Christian Union.” We know little of the activities of this group since they kept few records, but these meager beginnings are part of the roots of what the Church of God is today.

R.G. SPURLING JR.

R.G. Spurling Jr. became the real catalyst for the early development of the group to which the Church traces its historical roots. He understood that the nature of Christianity was the law of love rather than a creed or doctrine that could be used to divide Christians. Maintaining a unity among believers meant to view the New Testament as the only “infallible rule of faith and practice” that contains everything “necessary for salvation and church government.” If something was not contrary to the New Testament, he believed that Christians should give one another “equal rights and privileges to read, believe, and practice for themselves in all matters of religion.” Spurling was a licensed minister in the Missionary Baptist Church. He was disturbed about certain traditions and creeds that he considered a hardship for God’s people; he was particularly troubled with *Landmarkism* that had dominated Baptist life in the region during his lifetime.

The term *Landmark* came from Proverbs 22:28: “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.” Landmark Baptists believed that the Baptist Movement went all the way back to the time of Christ, that it was necessary to be baptized by a Baptist minister and that only Baptist churches were true churches.

Spurling raised a very strong objection to this belief. He believed that if individuals testified that they knew Jesus as their Lord and Savior and believed the New Testament, then they should be able to come together in Christian union. This is what he attempted to do in 1886 at the Barney Creek Meetinghouse. This spirit of Christian union remained with Spurling all of his life. He was a church planter who not only planted the Christian Union Church at Barney Creek, but also planted congregations wherever he went. Apparently Spurling organized three other congregations after 1886.

Another group of individuals who formed a primary root of the Church of God were likely influenced by the holiness teachings of Benjamin Hardin Irwin. Also in 1896, four men began a revival in the Shearer Schoolhouse near Camp Creek in Cherokee County, North Carolina. William Martin, a Methodist, along with Baptists Joe M. Tipton, Elias Milton McNabb and William Hamby (Spurling’s brother-in-law), held a ten-day meeting that attracted a great deal of attention.

Their message urged the people to seek and obtain sanctification subsequent to their salvation. They prayed, fasted and wept before the Lord until a great revival came, bringing results that included speaking in tongues and divine healing.

WILLIAM F. BRYANT

William F. Bryant was a Baptist deacon who joined the Holiness movement and began holding Sunday school and prayer meetings, becoming a leader by his initiative. However, the holiness message was not popular and soon the worshipers were barred from the Shearer Schoolhouse and forced to meet in their homes. Eventually, they built a quaint log church across the road from the schoolhouse, but the hostility toward the group and their message was so great that the structure was dismantled and burned by their antagonists.

It was not an easy time to maintain faith with a holiness distinctive in this region. Persecutions continued and many, including Bryant, were excommunicated from their churches for this new doctrine of holiness. But despite the persecution, Bryant continued to lead the people who experienced tongues-speech and divine healing. They had no clear understanding of the Holy Spirit and considered speaking in tongues as one of many manifestations that might accompany sanctification. Their primary message was holiness which they proclaimed with conviction and fervor.

Many of these believers had experienced a baptism in the Holy Spirit and miraculous healings, but they still did not have an understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. W.F. Bryant was a godly man, but a layman with very little biblical training. So they focused on an ascetic lifestyle and searched for subsequent spiritual experiences, which they also called baptisms. They gave these experiences names corresponding to powerful elements. Thus, they talked about a baptism of "holy dynamite," a baptism of "holy lyddite," and a baptism of "holy oxidite."

Spurling regularly fellowshiped with the people at Camp Creek and encouraged them to organize as a church, but Bryant resisted for a while. Finally, on May 12, 1902, they organized as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek and selected Spurling as their pastor. Although Spurling's earlier congregations were named according to an emphasis on Christian union, this one was named according to their new emphasis on holiness.

A.J. TOMLINSON

In 1902, the group found another sojourner, A.J. Tomlinson, who shared their convictions. His role was critical to the development of the group in the formative years. Some believe that without his leadership the Church of God would be at best a handful of believers in the mountains.

Tomlinson was born into a Quaker farm family in Westfield, Indiana. He found Christ after his marriage in 1889 and soon became convinced of the doctrine of entire sanctification. He traveled to the mountain region of Western North Carolina, East Tennessee, and North Georgia, selling Bibles for the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society in 1896. He met W.F. Bryant after selling New Testaments to his young boys, and he learned of Bryant's holiness group. Tomlinson developed deep spiritual friendships with Bryant, Spurling and others in and around

the Camp Creek community, but he also resisted the idea of organization. In 1899, Tomlinson settled with his family in nearby Culberson, North Carolina, where he established a ministry base, and founded a school for children, a Sunday school, a clothing distribution center, and attempted to establish an orphanage. To gain financial support, Tomlinson published a four-page periodical called *Samson's Foxes*, featuring news from the Divine Healing and Holiness Movements as well as appeals for help for his "mountain missionary work."

Tomlinson was a man of great ability and great vision. He embraced the technology of his day—printing—to proclaim the message and raise required funds for ministry. His focus was not just spiritual but he also had an eye toward benevolence, evidenced by the orphanage and clothing distribution. Moreover, while he was not a man with advanced theological degrees, he endeavored to prepare himself to teach the Word by enrolling in Bible schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, and New Durham, Maine. These three influences—technology for ministry, benevolence ministry, and teaching the Scripture—shaped the foundation of the Church of God as it grew to become a Spirit-empowered Pentecostal Movement.

Tomlinson found a spiritual home to build his ministry. He considered R.G. Spurling a spiritual father and mentor while W.F. Bryant was like a brother and companion in ministry. Tomlinson was selected as the pastor of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek which allowed Bryant and Spurling to travel and minister evangelistically. In his first year as pastor, 14 new members were won to the congregation, including M.S. Lemons, a minister and schoolteacher from Bradley County, Tennessee. In December 1904, Tomlinson purchased a home about 50 miles from Camp Creek in Cleveland, Tennessee. Cleveland had some amenities of a small city, primarily its location on the railroad, which gave Tomlinson additional means to spread the gospel.

The General Assembly

Tomlinson established new congregations in Union Grove and Drygo, Tennessee, as well as Jones, Georgia. As the ministry began to grow beyond the one congregation at Camp Creek, there was a need for a general meeting "to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge" in the attempt to restore New Testament Christianity. This first Assembly of the "churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia, and Western North Carolina" met January 26-27, 1906. Twenty-one people gathered in the home of J.C. Murphy, a deacon of the Camp Creek congregation (a structure that can be visited still today). At this meeting, they prayed, studied the Scriptures, and sought answers to important questions.

TOPICS DISCUSSED

The topics discussed at that first Assembly reveal the issues with which those early congregations wrestled, some of which are still important today: local church records, family worship, Sunday schools, Communion and footwashing, prayer meetings, the use of tobacco, and the transferring of church membership. Evangelism was particularly heavy on the hearts of the delegates, and the Assembly agreed to "do our best to press into every open door."

This first Assembly established a model for the Church of God. The people sought God and searched the Scriptures in order to develop and define practice and polity. They had a deep conviction that the New Testament was the guideline for Christianity in their century just as it had been for the first century. They also believed that when the exact New Testament order was found, they would experience the same supernatural growth and success that the apostles enjoyed after the Day of Pentecost.

ACTIONS TAKEN

The second Assembly in 1907 was also of particular importance because actions taken there impact the present structures of the Church. In fact, three events seem particularly important today. First, the ministers met separately in a "Preacher's Conference." Beginning as an occasional practice, this set a precedent for the ministers to discuss some matters apart from the larger body. Second, they adopted the name "Church of God," based on Paul's references to the Church of God in 1, 2 Corinthians. And third, this Assembly instituted a new order of ministry—that of "evangelist." Until this time, they had recognized the primary orders of bishop (sometimes called elder), deacon, and licensed minister.

DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINE

Some understand that the primary distinctive that sets the Pentecostal faith apart from other conservative Evangelicals is not just the belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but specifically, the doctrine that the primary physical evidence of such an experience is speaking in other tongues. Prior to 1908, although many spoke in tongues, the doctrine of initial evidence was not established as a distinguishing doctrine. However, following the third Assembly in 1908, a powerful service was held at the Cleveland church (now known as the North Cleveland Church) that radically transformed the life and ministry of A.J. Tomlinson. Tomlinson had been preaching for about a year after 1907 about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and had been personally seeking the experience. Following a sermon by guest evangelist G.B. Cashwell, who had recently come from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, A.J. Tomlinson received his long-sought-for experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Cashwell was known to preach the message of baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking with other tongues. He had received the experience at the Azusa Street revival under the ministry of William J. Seymour.

The Expansion of the Church

A.J. Tomlinson's leadership continued from 1903 to 1923. The people identified his leadership and supported his proposals. In 1909, the Assembly, made up of 12 congregations, established the office of general moderator (renamed the next year general overseer). The Assembly called for the general moderator to serve full time as an executive officer instead of only at the annual Assembly meetings. His duties included issuing credentials, maintaining records of all ministers, looking after the general interests of the Church, filling vacancies and acting as moderator and clerk of the annual General Assembly. At the age of 43, A.J. Tomlinson was unanimously selected to fill this office. He had moderated the Assemblies of the past and was an articulate and powerful speaker who was well studied, dynamic, and visionary in his leadership. The selection of Tomlinson was a natural choice for the delegates.

PUBLICATIONS

Tomlinson's gifts in organization and publications did much to assist the progress of the Church. In 1904, Tomlinson published *The Way* with the editorial assistance of M.S. Lemons, featuring articles, sermons, and poetry on holiness. On March 1, 1910, the first issue of the *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* was published. The publication included editorials by Tomlinson, sermons, articles on doctrine, testimonies, and reports of ministry from the field. In 1911, the name was changed to *The Church of God Evangel*. Other publications were the *Minutes* of the Assemblies and tracts. The Church rented a small building across the street from Tomlinson's home in Cleveland to house the printing operations. In 1916, the work had grown so large that a publishing committee was selected to oversee publications. By 1917, the first building for the Publishing House was purchased.

EDUCATION

The need for education was recognized during this period. Tomlinson and many in the churches viewed education as an important tool for fulfilling the Great Commission. They understood the need to prepare young men and women for the ministry of the gospel. At the 1911 Assembly, Tomlinson shared his vision for starting a school. While there was an enthusiastic response, it was not until some years later, after years of discussion of costs, location, and facilities that on January 1, 1918, the first class of the Bible Training School was opened. The first teacher was Nora Chambers, a licensed evangelist who had attended Holmes College of the Bible in South Carolina. The first courses included Bible, geography, spelling, English, and music. A.J. Tomlinson was superintendent.

DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Preparation for ministry was the catalyst for the doctrinal development in the early period of Church of God history. In 1910, a committee was appointed by the Assembly to prepare exam questions and Biblical references for ministerial candidates. Later that year, the *Evangel* published the work of this committee under the title, "Church of God," noting that the Church stood for the whole Bible rightly divided and the New Testament as the only rule for faith and government. The committee presented a list of 25 items, including Biblical references that were published in the 1912 *Assembly Minutes* as "Teachings," after some minor changes.

WORLD MISSIONS

The Church of God began its expansion beyond the borders of the United States under A.J. Tomlinson. In 1909, while preaching in Pleasant Grove, Florida, Tomlinson received into the fellowship of the Church a retired Methodist minister named, R.M. Evans and native Bahamians, Edmond and Rebecca Barr. Later that year, the Barrs sailed to their homeland, becoming the first Church of God missionaries to preach abroad. After selling his possessions to finance the trip, R.M. Evans joined the Barrs in the Bahama Islands in 1910, accompanied by his wife and Carl M. Padgett. Evans was the first Church of God missionary to take the gospel from homeland to foreign soil. But this was what Dr. Charles Conn calls a "primitive period" for Pentecostal missions when missionaries were independent pioneers going off without sponsorship of denominations.

The Church of God supported many independent missionaries during the earliest period but gradually sent missionaries as well.

In 1911 and in each Assembly afterward, a Missions Committee made recommendations regarding home and world missions. In 1914, local churches were called upon to receive monthly offerings for world missions, and pastors were asked to emphasize the cause of missions.

BENEVOLENCE

The Church of God also undertook benevolence ministry in the United States in this early period of its history. In 1918, an international epidemic of influenza left many children orphans, and in 1919, Tomlinson challenged the Assembly to respond to this need by opening an orphanage in Cleveland. On December 17, 1920, the orphanage was opened, and two additional orphanages were opened in the two succeeding years.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

Organizationally, the Church grew in its governing structure. In 1911, state overseers were established where enough churches merited the appointment of someone to oversee the work in a particular area. The general overseer had presented a concept at the 1915 Assembly, and the group decided to select a "Council of Elders" in 1916. In February 1917, the members of this "Council of 12 Elders" were selected and were to have jurisdiction over all questions. Their decisions were to be ratified by the Assembly in session. The Assembly delegates seemed happy to trust the affairs of the Church to these choice men, two of which were selected by Tomlinson.

In 1914, A.J. Tomlinson was thought to be the theocratic leader of the Church and was installed as general overseer for life. The growth of the churches and the expanding ministries of the Church of God as it moved into the 1920s placed a great deal of responsibility and stress upon Tomlinson. During this period, controversy would sweep one of its great leaders from office, but the Church would demonstrate its resilience during crisis, and other leadership would emerge.

Church of God History: 1920s to 1950s

The Church's First Major Crisis

The crisis the Church faced in 1923 led to a division in the Church and was a crucial point in its history. It revolved around A.J. Tomlinson, the general overseer. The analogy of a divorce perhaps best describes the events of 1923. Certainly the Church of God family was painfully divided. Tomlinson had been their pastor and the most significant spiritual leader for 20 years. He converted this small Appalachian congregation he had joined in 1903 into a movement with a vision to reach the world. He further transformed a group of churches organized according to Baptist polity into a centralized and episcopal organization. He then filled that organization with the conviction that through them God was doing an extraordinary work in these "last days" and with the expectation that all of Christianity would come to know the biblical church as they knew it. Questioning and ultimately rejecting Tomlinson's leadership was a traumatic moment for the Church of God.

The onset of the 1920s is described well by Dr. Charles Conn in *Like a Mighty Army* as “storm clouds gathering.” In 1920, a new 4,000 seat auditorium was dedicated and used for the Assembly of that year, which while it was an accomplishment to be celebrated, it also carried a price tag of tremendous debt. The publications were not creating enough revenue to operate the printing plant. At the 1920 Assembly, it was decided to place all the tithes into the general treasury with seven men regulating and distributing funds to ministers according to their needs and the efficiency of their work. In 1921, widespread postwar unemployment and economic difficulties resulted in a decrease of 51 percent of the tithe sent to general headquarters. Problems developed as ministers were not receiving funds enough to feed their families, setting an obvious context for discontentment.

Tomlinson's leadership strategy was one that forced him to oversee almost every ministry of the Church, and that strategy started to fail as Tomlinson grew older and the Church grew larger. He became unable to handle every detail of the heavy burden of administration which created great physical and emotional strain for him personally. He wrote in his personal journal of September 2, 1921, that he was filling the offices of general overseer, editor and publisher, Publishing House business manager, superintendent of the Bible Training School, Superintendent of the Orphanage and Children's Home in addition to other responsibilities such as disbursing the tithes to the ministers. He noted that he worked an average of 18 hours a day and rarely found time even to go to town.

When those with questions about financial management rose to voice dissent among the Elders Council, Tomlinson considered them both a personal affront and an attack on God's plan for a theocratic church government. The Assembly of 1922 passed a measure calling for the election of all officials at every Assembly, which reversed the general overseer's tenure “for life.” Assistance was given by the election of F.J. Lee as superintendent of education and J.S. Llewellyn as editor and publisher.

The changes were not readily accepted by Tomlinson who had been running the operation of the Church almost single-handedly. In 1923, an investigative committee met with the Elders Council and other ministers to discuss the financial condition of the Church. In the end, Tomlinson was asked to step down as general overseer, but he refused to do so, maintaining that he had been placed there by God's divine will. On July 26, he was dismissed as general overseer, and F.J. Lee was selected to replace him. These changes were distressing to local congregations who were not present. For a short period of time, many local churches did not know what was going on or who was the leader of the Church of God. Overseers rushed back to their states to inform pastors.

F.J. LEE

F.J. Lee was already a well-respected leader. He had been a Baptist clerk and choir director who received his Pentecostal experience during an extraordinary revival in Cleveland in 1908. Lee had been on the first Publishing Committee, had been one of the first two selected for the Elders Council, and had been selected as superintendent of education. A close friend of Tomlinson, he had been called upon to help investigate the financial state of the Church. The fact that Lee came to support the impeachment of his longtime friend and colleague gave credibility to the process.

Tomlinson, who was a tireless and unstoppable leader, continued at the helm of a group that became known as the Church of God of Prophecy. Today, both organizations demonstrate the indelible imprint of Tomlinson's influence—a vision for world harvest. The Church of God desperately needed leadership to step up to the plate during this crisis, and God had a man for such an hour in F.J. Lee.

Lee led the Church for just a few years, however, he died in office in 1928 at the young age of 53. During his tenure, he led a Church plagued by litigation and financial crisis subsequent to the division. The problems were exacerbated by the fact that the post office sent some funds to the wrong organization since both were located in Cleveland. So while the Church experienced only moderate increases in membership and funds, Lee's leadership was spiritual and served to lift the morale of the constituents.

Subsequent Significant Developments

THE 1924 ASSEMBLY

The 1924 Assembly established the office of secretary general, and his responsibility was to serve as clerk of the Assemblies. Also, every state was encouraged to hold an annual camp meeting. At the 1926 Assembly, three standing boards were created: Missions Board, Board of Education, and the Publishing Committee. From here, the Church of God moved toward governance by specialized boards of management. The Assembly of 1928 created the office of assistant general overseer in the wake of the pending death of F.J. Lee who had been ill but refused the care of doctors, believing firmly that divine healing was God's only plan for His people. Before the 1928 Assembly concluded, delegates were informed of Lee's death. S.W. Latimer, who was elected as the assistant general overseer, was elevated to general overseer, and R.P. Johnson was elected as assistant general overseer at the 1929 Assembly.

THE BISHOPS COUNCIL

The Great Depression, starting in 1929, brought tumultuous economic times for the United States. The Church of God Assembly during that eventful year made some decisions that have impacted the Church to this day. A major step at the 1929 Assembly was the passage of the measure which dissolved the Council of 70 and called for all ordained ministers, then called bishops, to be considered councilors, known as the Bishops Council, which was to convene each year preceding the Assembly. Now the procedure of business would flow from the Council of 12 who would then make its recommendations to the Bishops Council. Those measures accepted by the Bishops Council became recommendations to the General Assembly to consider and adopt or vote down. That process is still the procedure today.

THE *LIGHTED PATHWAY*

Another decision was to create the Young People's Endeavor (YPE), a ministry whose sole function was to focus on the needs of the Church's youth. A committed woman, Alda B. Harrison, organized a Young People's Mission Band in the Cleveland church sometime during 1923. She

eventually began publishing the *Lighted Pathway*, a monthly magazine dedicated to the Young People's Endeavor. She published the magazine with no assistance and little encouragement, but it grew into an influential publication. Finally in 1937, the Church of God made this magazine its own publication. The *Lighted Pathway* continued to inspire several generations of Church of God youth until it was discontinued in 1990. The Church took immense strides in 1946 when it forged a National Youth Department with Ralph E. Williams as director. Then in 1948, the work of the Sunday school was added to the responsibilities of the youth director.

THE LAST ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

The period between 1923 and the 1950s brought additional administrative changes. In 1944, a limitation of four years was placed on tenures of administrative officers, executive councilmen, and state overseers. In 1946, the last annual Assembly met and all later Assemblies would meet biennially. The Home for Children was moved from Cleveland to Sevierville, Tennessee, in 1949. In 1954, a new General Headquarters and Publishing House facility was erected.

BIBLE SCHOOLS

This period also marked expansions in the ministries of education in the Church. The Bible Training School was moved to Cleveland in 1947 as a liberal arts college on the campus of the former Bob Jones University and was renamed Lee College in honor of Flavius J. Lee. In 1998, Lee College became Lee University.

Following successful Bible courses under the direction of Pastor Frank Lemons in Lemmon, South Dakota, State Overseer Paul H. Walker asked the 1934 Assembly for permission to establish a permanent school in the Northwest due to the distance to the Bible Training School in Cleveland. With permission granted, the second term of Northwest Bible and Music Academy began in 1935. When the Church of God purchased a campground in Minot, North Dakota, the school moved to those facilities. Later renamed Northwest Bible College, the school operated until 1987, a time period when many private higher educational institutions fell on hard times and closed. Pacific Northwest Bible School was established in Yakima, Washington, in 1944 but closed after only three years. In 1949 reorganization took place in Pasadena, California, under the name West Coast Bible School and was later known as West Coast Christian College. It was relocated to Fresno, California, in 1950 and operated until 1992 when it closed during difficult financial times for private colleges. The staff continued to operate as a provider of on-site seminars and classes throughout the territory west of the Mississippi River. In 1999, this entity became the Western Division of the Church of God School of Ministry. Although not associated with the Church of God in its beginnings, Patten College in Oakland, California, was founded by Evangelist Bebe Patten as the Oakland Bible Institute following a 19-week evangelistic crusade in Oakland in 1944. In the recent 1990s, Patten College affiliated with the Church of God.

In the Northwest, J.W. Bruce served as the first president of International Bible College founded in 1936 in Consul, Saskatchewan (now located in Moose Jaw). Situated in the southern United States, the International Preparatory Institute began in San Antonio, Texas, in 1947 as a training center for Latin American missionaries. Vessie D. Hargrave was the founder and first president.

Its closure in 1954 was followed by the opening of the Spanish Institute of Ministries in Houston in 1975, which was merged with West Coast Christian College in 1983. The Institute found itself without a home when West Coast was closed in 1992, but reopened in 1994 in Dallas, Texas, as the Hispanic Institute of Ministry under the leadership of President Isaias Robles.

MUSIC MINISTRY

The Church organized the Tennessee Music and Printing Company as a trade division of the Publishing House in 1931. In 1935, the Church built a new Publishing House several blocks away on Montgomery Avenue, its present location. (As noted, the Publishing House erected its current building in 1954.)

In 1934, the Assembly created the office of music editor, and the Church selected Otis L. McCoy to serve in this new ministry. Under McCoy's influence, the Church of God most often sang from "gospel" or "convention" songbooks. It was not until 1951 that the Church published its first hymnbook, *Church Hymnal*. Although the Church issued a new hymnal in 1969, *Hymns of the Spirit*, the ever-popular *Church Hymnal* continues to be a best-seller for the company.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY

During this period, women were involved in ministry either through credentialed ministry or laywomen's ministries. The Second Assembly called attention to what has been a fact throughout all of the history of Christianity, that is, that there were more women in the local churches than men. Laywomen have always worked side-by-side with men in the Church of God. Jonnie Belle Wood initiated Women's Ministries when she inspired the women of Electra, Texas, to make and sell quilts in order to purchase a piano during the financially difficult days of the late 1920s. Quilting and other money-making endeavors of the newly formed Ladies Willing Workers Band (LWWB) became essential to the life of the congregation. Through this agency many churches were built and survived as a result of fund-raising efforts. But it is also important to note that from the beginning the LWWB emphasized prayer and spirituality alongside their fund-raising efforts. The Assembly approved the national organization in 1936, and the wife of the general overseer was appointed as national president in 1950.

The Assembly agreed to license women to preach in 1909 in recognition of Joel's prophecy that daughters would prophesy in the last days. But from 1909, the Assembly has also limited women to preaching rather than governmental responsibilities. By 1950, more than 18 percent of Church of God ministers were women. That percentage began to decrease as the Church became increasingly aligned with Evangelicals who did not approve of women ministers and as it became more bureaucratic and middle class.

WORLD MISSIONS

The work of world missions from the 1920s through the 1950s expanded greatly and was more appropriately organized. Following the example of R.M. Evans, other missionaries set out for the mission field. Sam C. Perry took the Pentecostal message to Cuba in 1910. Brinson and Jennie

Rushin traveled to China in 1914. F.L. Ryder sailed to the Virgin Islands where he established a church before traveling on to South America in 1917. Key missions efforts included Maria Atkinson to Mexico in 1931 and Herman Lauster to his home in Germany in 1936. Robert F. Cook brought his mission in India into the Church of God in 1936, and Paul C. Pitt's mission in China came into the Church of God in 1937. Then Edmond and Pearl Stark took the Church of God to Angola in 1938. When Edmond became stricken with malaria and died, the burden for Angola was not buried with him. Pearl Stark returned to Angola in 1947 to minister the gospel alone.

Despite the initial vague strategy of Church of God world missions, the organizational structure developed a great deal during this period. Recall that in 1911, each Assembly included a Missions Committee to make recommendations regarding home and world missions. In 1926, this was changed to a standing board in order to further the work of foreign missions. In 1936, J.H. Ingram was appointed as a foreign missions field representative. That year, Ingram took a "Golden Jubilee Tour" to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Church of God and visited 31 countries and colonies. Later M.P. Cross became the first full-time World Missions executive secretary in 1942, and the Church began appointing area superintendents in 1945. In 1945, the Church established a Spanish edition of the Church of God *Evangel*, and appointed the first full-time Missions representative, who traveled the United States promoting world missions.

THE DECLARATION OF FAITH

This period was also a time of development in regard to theological statements, particularly the doctrine of sanctification. Early leaders of the movement were clearly Wesleyan holiness in belief and practice—espousing the belief in a second definite work of grace that cleansed the believer from sin.

In the 1940s, a division arose between those of differing views of sanctification. Charles W. Conn characterized the debate as "centered not so much on the reality of sanctification as on the time and process of its inception in the human heart. Some held vigorously that it is an instantaneous or 'definite,' work of grace, and others believed it to be continual and progressive." In the midst of this debate, the Church saw the need for a clarifying statement of faith and adopted the Declaration of Faith in 1948.

This declaration was not considered a new doctrine or a creed but only a statement of what the Church had always believed was taught in the New Testament. The language on sanctification remained Wesleyan holiness, but the Church allowed individuals the right to interpret "subsequent" as logical rather than temporal.

Important to this theological confession was the clear communication a few years earlier that the Church of God did not understand itself as the sole possessors of God's revelation. In 1943, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was organized and the Church of God was a charter member of that body. Later in 1948, the Church of God and seven other church groups instituted the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) now known as the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA). The Church of God was also one of the founding members of the World Pentecostal Association (WPA) and the International Pentecostal Press Association (IPPA).

SUMMARY

The period between 1923 and the 1950s was a time of growth and progress in the Church of God. The Church demonstrated that it possessed the leadership resources to stand the test of the crucible of crisis and continue to move ahead. This period also demonstrated that the Church of God did not view itself isolated from other Evangelical and Pentecostal believers. Its mission to reach around the world and at home was sharpened as it made serious investments into the educational institutions that were training men and women to reach the lost.

Church of God History: 1960s – Present

This section focuses upon the period between the 1960s and the turn of the 21st century. Some of the major developments of this period should be understood against the backdrop of U.S. history. The '60s were particularly important because of the tumultuous atmosphere. The rebellion of the youth in the 1960s on many college campuses and the more liberal critical theologies being entrenched in the seminaries and pulpits of the United States placed the Church of God in a position of conflict with society. At least since the Civil War, the United States had not experienced the kind of inner turmoil as was witnessed in the 1960s. The country certainly had never seen the images of violence and apparent rebellion such as that which was invading the living rooms of the American people every evening through the advent of television. While many Americans called for radical changes in society, others attempted to call the country back to an earlier and purer day. Interestingly, those who tried to conserve the past often exaggerated its ideals in the process.

Church of God Teachings

The Church of God responded to the open liberal lifestyles of U.S. society by expressing in more exacting details the majority's convictions about certain kinds of behaviors thought to be unbecoming. Prior to the late 1950s, the Church of God maintained only a few notations of practical holiness included in the list of "Teachings" published in the *Evangel* in 1910; those issues included total abstinence from all liquor and strong drink, against the use of tobacco in any form, "meats and drinks" and the Sabbath. The 1912 Assembly that ratified these teachings also included statements against members wearing gold for ornament or decoration, against members belonging to lodges and against members swearing. In 1954, a notation on "divorce and remarriage" was added.

Charles W. Conn described the 1958 Assembly as "one of the rockiest Assemblies the Church had ever had." The issue that caused such a stir was a measure to permit members to wear wedding bands. The concern of some was that allowing the wearing of wedding bands would open the floodgates to abuses and members would begin wearing unnecessary jewelry. Although the measure passed by a slim margin, the concerns over holiness resulted in a reevaluation of the holiness principles of the Church, and in 1960, a resolution was passed reaffirming the Church's commitment to standards of holiness in principles of conduct.

Attempting to assuage the concerns of preserving the holiness standards and in an effort to reject the liberal moral values that emerged in the 1960s, Assemblies in the 1970s further defined

the practical expressions of holiness. Conn described the 1974 Assembly as enmeshed in divisive debate that threatened to blunt the Church's growing edge. The issues being debated were four additional statements about behavior standards related to holiness. The discussion became, in Dr. Conn's words, emotional and intense. He compared it to the tension of the 1946 Assembly that was swept up with the debate about the doctrine of sanctification. In 1974, the Church divided the "Teachings" into Doctrinal and Practical Commitments and added the statements that our members dress according to the teachings of the New Testament—women are to have long hair and men short hair, members are not to attend movies, dances, other ungodly amusements, or go swimming with the opposite sex, other than immediate family. A measure passed in the following Assembly of 1976 which said that members are to conform to the Scripture relative to outward adornment and to the use of cosmetics.

Some leaders viewed this as an overcorrection and desired to have a positive statement of faith that reflected Biblical standards which were not bound to a specific culture or generation. Others viewed the Teachings as sacrosanct—canon to be obeyed. After much work of a committee that was commissioned in 1982 to study the Practical Commitments and after a great deal of discussion, a new document was presented to the 1988 Assembly. The revised Practical Commitments, though considerably longer than the Declaration of Faith or Teachings, describe the biblical standards for Christian behavior. The document was adopted by the 1988 Assembly to replace the previous Practical Commitments.

The Church of God Expands

The period of the 1960s to the end of the 20th century marked other important changes and expansions for the Church of God. This was true particularly in the area of World Missions. The World Missions Department and the Youth and Christian Education Department linked up in 1957 to fulfill the Great Commission. This partnership was called Youth World Evangelism Appeal (now Youth World Evangelism Action). Each year, Church of God youth tackle an important project such as building facilities for missionary training centers, local churches, or educational institutions.

In 1964, giving to Church of God World Missions reached over \$1 million for a single year. By 1981, the amount raised by Youth World Evangelism Action alone exceeded \$1 million in one year. Such sacrifice at home and abroad brought substantial growth to the Church of God. Indeed, the year 1966 witnessed membership in missions areas surpass that of the United States and Canada.

AFFILIATIONS AND AMALGAMATIONS

Part of the growth of the Church of God around the world has come by way of affiliation and amalgamation with national churches. This kind of growth has been significant for the Church as it grapples with becoming an international church. In some parts of the world, the Church has adopted a strategy of partnering with movements that were birthed before the Church of God arrived there. This has allowed for a wise use of resources. These include:

- The Apostolic Church of God in Romania
- The Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa (1951)
- The Bethel Full Gospel Church in Indonesia (1967)
- The Latvian Pentecostal Union in Latvia
- The Full Gospel Church of Vietnam (1995).

One of the issues the Church currently faces is what it means to talk about a movement that had its beginnings in the southern United States, but today has its greatest number of members in one country in Indonesia. Specifically, what does this mean in terms of the decision-making process and the selection of leadership?

It is also exciting to see that the Church of God's vision for world harvest has long been more than just a North American vision. Today, Church of God members in many nations are sending missionaries around the world. To mention just a few, Korean missionaries have established the Church of God in Nepal; South Americans have sent missionaries to Russia; Indonesians have planted churches in China; and Word for the World, a Church of God ministry in the Philippines, has established churches in over 10 nations, including the United States.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

The changes during the period since the 1960s also involve some administrative changes at the general offices. In 1968, a new general headquarters building was completed. The Assembly of 1972 initiated a change in the financial system of funding general and state offices as discussed in the recent previous Assemblies. The desire was to allow for more tithes to remain in the local churches. Since 1917, only 80 percent of the tithes stayed in the local church, 10 percent was to be sent to general offices and 10 percent sent to state offices. A reduction was to be made over a 20-year period that would bring the amount of tithes sent out of the local church to 10 percent. This was in addition to the 2 ½ percent for world missions and 2 ½ percent for state home missions. Although it was a time of adjustment for administration, the theory behind the plan proved to be accurate: the financial picture of the Church of God grew and stabilized and the local churches became stronger.

In 2008, the General Assembly adopted a plan that would again reduce the amount of finances sent monthly from local churches to the international and state/regional offices. Upon completion of a five-year reduction program, the total amount sent with monthly reports totals 10 percent of the tithes received in the local church—5 percent sent to the international office and 5 percent to the state/regional office. Administration expenses come from this "tithe of tithes" and missions offerings are used for designated projects.

TECHNOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Just as the Church took advantage of communications technology to fulfill her scriptural commission through print, the years after the '60s also saw the Church embracing other forms of technology to communicate the gospel. Early attempts at radio broadcasting were undertaken while John C. Jernigan was general overseer. The Church of God broadcast sermons on the radio in the

late 1940s from a station near the Mexican border, but this was short-lived. The 1956 Assembly initiated a regular radio program that continues today. Forward in Faith first aired December 7, 1958, with announcer Bennie S. Triplett and speaker Earl P. Paulk Jr. Six stations carried the first broadcast. The program expanded to 50 stations within the first year. Now with computer technology available, the Church has established a Web site for members and Internet surfers.

EDUCATIONAL ADVANCES

As educational efforts in the Church of God became increasingly diverse, the Executive Council decided that the demands of the 21st century made it prudent for the Church to combine the various educational entities under a single structure, thus forming the Division of Education. The Division has oversight of programs, expansion, and development of colleges, seminaries, universities, Bible institutes, and ministerial training models throughout the International Church. Recalling the vision of the first Bible Training School and correspondence courses, those historic directions are being merged with new paths to guide the three units that compose the Division of Education, which are the USA/Canada Education System, the International Education System, and the Ministerial Development/School of Ministry.

Formal education in the USA Church was launched in 1918, and the driving force of education throughout the Church of God has been derived from the schools that developed in Cleveland, Tennessee. Presently, the USA/Canada Education System embraces five educational institutions and their extension campuses: Lee University, Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Patten University, International Bible College, and Hispanic Education Ministries.

Ministerial Development/School of Ministry

In 1974, the General Department of Education was established. In 1988, it was renamed Ministerial Development and brought directly under the supervision of the Executive Committee. The General Assembly passed the creation of a State Board of Ministerial Development in 1992. When the Church of God Division of Education was established in 1999, Ministerial Development was placed in that division by the Executive Council. The state board, under the direction of the administrative bishop, is to implement the programs of Ministerial Development and to promote Church of God educational programs and institutions.

The School of Ministry was begun in 1999 as a method of ministerial training and education for distance learning purposes.

A primary program of MDSOM is the Ministerial Internship Program (MIP). The MIP which started in 1978 is now operating in several countries and several languages, and ensures the formation and practical training of Church of God ministers.

The Calling And Ministry Studies (CAMS) is a program to help ministerial candidates clarify their call to either clergy ministry or lay ministry. It is a prerequisite program to the MIP and is designed to affirm individuals and provide them with a solid foundation for ministry and spiritual leadership. Both the MIP and CAMS programs incorporate Certificate In Ministerial Studies (CIMS) courses and offer CIMS credit through the School of Ministry.

The Ministerial Development/School of Ministry (MDSOM) has developed the Certificate In Ministerial Studies (CIMS) program—a program of study consisting of 34 CIMS units. At the option of Church of God institutions of higher education, CIMS units may be converted to credit by that institution when the student meets the entrance requirements, is accepted, and enrolls. The CIMS curriculum is designed as introductory studies to address multiple areas of pastoral and local church ministry. The program can be completed in either of four venues: Distance Learning Centers, Distance Learning Seminars, Individual Study, and Internet Study. Both the Calling And Ministry Studies (CAMS) program and the Ministerial Internship Program (MIP) utilize some of the courses from the CIMS curriculum.

In September 1999, the MDSOM introduced the first Certificate In Ministerial Studies (CIMS) course. Since then, 20 CIMS courses have been developed in video-lesson format, each designed to be coordinated with a study guide and textbook.

Another very important program through Ministerial Development is the Lay Leadership Development (LLD) program. In 1994, the General Assembly created a Lay Minister's Certification and required the completion of Lay Leadership Development Levels I and II as the training requirement for certification. Lay Leadership is a program designed to assist pastors in building a partnership with laity and in producing lay leaders for the local church and ministry teams. Lay Leadership Development is now translated into Spanish and French and is being used in the United States and many other countries around the world.

The MDSOM also produces and distributes ministerial licensure study guides, examinations, and necessary forms for all levels of clergy credentials. These materials are translated and made available to each country where the Church of God is operating.

The MDSOM works in close partnership with World Missions, national overseers, educational institutions, and various departments to promote training and to provide ministerial resources.

CARING MINISTRIES

In addition to ministerial training through educational institutions and the Office of Ministerial Development, the Church of God has given increasing attention to the care of its clergy and their families. In 1989, the Church established the Office of Ministerial Care and appointed a full-time director in 1992. Ministries include enrichment programs, telephone counseling, professional consultation and referral, crisis intervention, advocacy, and missionary care, along with SpiritCare for retired ministers and their spouses.

The Church of God established a comprehensive Department of Benevolence in 1974, although caring for the needy has always been a part of the ministry of the Church. A.J. Tomlinson provided food and clothing for the students attending school in his home in 1900. W.F. Bryant maintained a custom of taking clothing to the barefooted needy in the Tellico Mountains of East Tennessee. In 1902, Tomlinson attempted to establish an orphanage in Culberson, and in Cleveland, Bryant followed suit in 1911.

The Home for Children Board was reorganized as the Department of Benevolence under Director W.J. Brown, and it has expanded its ministries in the recent decades. In 1987, the department opened both Covenant Place, a home for unmarried pregnant teenagers, and the Crowley Center for Abused Children in Sevierville. New River Ranch, a West Virginia ministry for troubled teens, opened the following year. Additionally, the department instituted the Heart of Florida Youth Ranch in 1990 and launched Operation Compassion in 1994. Operation Compassion focuses on ministry to the elderly and the hungry.

MUSIC MINISTRIES

With increasing needs beyond the publication of music resources, the Church of God established the Department of Music Ministries in 1992 and appointed Delton Alford as the first department director. The ministry continues to work with Pathway Press in the creation and printing of music materials. Additionally, it promotes the use of music resources, the development of Licensed Ministers of Music, and fellowship among music ministers. Through SpiritSound Music, the ministry provides recording facilities and promotion.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

The ministry of women—both credentialed and laywomen—developed in the years from 1960 forward. The LWVB became a fully functioning department in 1964 under the leadership of a department head and a board of directors. Constantly adding to their activities, the department changed its name to Ladies Auxiliary in 1970, to Department of Ladies Ministries in 1982 and to Department of Women's Ministries in 1998.

In the 1950s and '60s there was a significant decline in the percentage of Church of God women ministers. This gradually began to reverse in the 1990s. Two important events occurred in the last decade of the 20th century. In 1990, the Assembly dropped the use of the title "Lady Evangelist" for women ministers and gave licensed women the same rights and responsibilities as male ministers. This allowed women to administer the Lord's Supper, baptize in water, and perform weddings. However, the Assembly reserved the governmental functions, such as serving on the General Council, for male ministers. Then in 1992, the Assembly allowed women to speak and vote in the business sessions of the General Assembly. This action made women fully functioning participants in the highest governing body of the Church of God.

In the 2010 International General Assembly, the Women's Ministry Department was transitioned into a discipleship program for women. Local churches continue to provide Women's Ministries.

MILITARY MINISTRIES

The Church of God in its earliest years maintained a position against their members going to war. That position softened after World War I, and the Church changed its position in the wake of World War II, allowing members to be guided by their own consciences, while supporting the conscientious objector.

By World War II, the Church of God recognized the need to minister to member and non-member alike who served in the military. Efforts to minister to soldiers during World War II included sending letters and phonograph recordings to those in uniform, publishing and distributing *Strength for Service*, and sending the *Lighted Pathway* to those in the armed forces. Additionally, there were countless efforts by congregations to minister to military personnel located near them.

General Overseer H.L. Chesser broached the need for Church of God chaplains at the 1952 Assembly. "Who will volunteer? Who will prepare himself?" challenged the general overseer. The first Church of God military chaplain was Edward E. Shoupe who was commissioned on July 24, 1956, and in 1958, was called by the U.S. Air Force to active duty. The Church of God Chaplains Commission was organized in 1978. The development of this commission allowed an increase in the rate of Church of God chaplains entering the armed forces and encouraged the expansion of the chaplains' ministry beyond the military.

The chaplaincy is only one way the Church of God sought to initiate ministry to the military personnel. Another way it sought to minister to the military was through the Servicemen's Centers. The development of the Servicemen's Centers is an example of a vision in the field, inspiring a ministry that was then adopted by the International Offices. The dream of Servicemen's Centers to minister to military personnel around the world was born in the heart of J. Don Amison while he was serving in the army. Having served as pastor of a congregation that ministered to the military, Amison recognized the special needs of soldiers.

Following his own discharge from the Army, and with his only support, the generosity of friends and strangers, Amison relocated to Germany in 1961. He held a Washington's Birthday service for military personnel, and they had an organizational meeting. Those in attendance established an office, selected a council, and appointed Amison as director of the European Division of the Church of God Servicemen's Department—a department that did not exist as far as the leadership of the Church of God was concerned. By March of 1961, Amison was publishing a magazine called *On Guard*.

Meanwhile, back at the International Offices, the Church of God officially recognized the need for ministry to the military and appointed Assistant General Overseer H.D. Williams as the first director of the Church of God Servicemen's Department. With support from the International Offices, it did not take long to establish Servicemen's Centers throughout Europe and the Far East. The department was later renamed Ministry to the Military.

EVANGELISM AND HOME MISSIONS

In 1956, the General Assembly created the National Evangelism Committee in order to support evangelists and create programs to assist churches in revival. According to Charles W. Conn, the Executive Council created the Evangelism and Home Missions Department in March 1963 in order to coordinate and direct the numerous evangelism efforts of the church.

LAY MINISTRIES

Soon after its establishment, the Evangelism and Home Missions Department began to emphasize lay evangelism and men's ministries. Laity had always been important to the growth of the Church of God, not because of established programs but because all members of the Church were involved in evangelism. The newly created Evangelism and Home Missions Department appointed a National Laymen's Committee in 1964, which became the National Laymen's Board by 1966. A part-time Lay Affairs Office began in 1972, developed into a full-time office by 1976, and is called the Lay Ministries Department today. Charles R. Beach served as the first executive secretary of this office, and Leonard Albert became field representative in 1974. Some of this department's ministries have included Schools of Lay Evangelism, Lay Literature for the Lost, International Lay Witness Week, Resurrection Breakfasts, International Laymen's Day and Pastor Appreciation Day.

Just as the Lay Ministries Department developed out of the Department of Evangelism and Home Missions, it birthed a new ministry that is called Men/Women of Action (MWOA). This ministry sponsors teams of volunteers for construction, disaster relief, short-term missions and personal evangelism around the world. Combining evangelism and labor, these teams minister to churches, medical clinics, orphanages, schools and others in need. Under the auspices of World Missions, MWOA began with the leadership of Robert D. Pace and continues under the leadership of Hugh Carver.

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS

This section will discuss the Church of God International General Assembly—its organization and its functions. In the greater scheme of the Lord's work, this may not sound like a very exciting or important subject; however, it is *very* important. In fact, attending an International General Assembly will verify that they can sometimes become very exciting.

Much can be known about an organization by how it conducts its business. Every organizational structure has certain characteristics that are drawn from the larger culture in which it was organized—or in which it functions. However, some organizations have discernable styles that are unique to their own understanding and experiences. If one is to truly understand this movement called the Church of God, it is essential to have an understanding about the way the Church is organized in order to fulfill its mission. Understanding the Church of God starts with understanding something about the International General Assembly.

The International General Assembly of the Church of God is perhaps the clearest example of how this organization conducts business. Out of its business sessions come certain prescriptive measures that suggest what the organization feels is important. Prescriptive information that flows from an organization boils down to two things: "Do this, or stop doing that."

Out of the International General Assembly come those ceremonial and formal activities that are honored by the Church. Every organization has certain "rituals" that seem to be part of the tapestry of its system. The International General Assembly has its own correlation rituals and activities that signal what this organization really values.

How an organization conducts its business is a reflection of how that organization sees the world and how it feels that it can best fulfill its mission or purpose in its existing environment. Any organization that loses touch with the environment in which it functions is certainly fated for failure. And, the Church needs to know that its environment is constantly changing. Thus, the International General Assembly of the Church of God has changed over the years—hopefully, with an eye toward better serving its constituency.

Emphases of the International General Assembly

THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFLECTS AN EMPHASIS ON CENTRALIZATION OF DOCTRINE AND POLITY.

It is at the International General Assembly where the churches come together to search the Scripture and determine what is in the best interest of the body. The Church of God has a centralized form of church government. Since the International General Assembly is the highest authority of the Church of God, decisions of the International General Assembly concerning doctrine and polity are binding upon all the churches that make up our movement. The *Minutes* of the International General Assembly state:

Local churches, when they have been accepted into the Church of God, are therefore bound by the decisions of the International General Assembly in matters of doctrine, teaching, and polity. (See *Minutes*, S35. Relationship of Local Church to the International General Assembly, 5.)

The Bible has a great deal to say about this matter of authority. In fact, it is important to recognize that the biblical basis for authority is not power, but a mutual dependency. The International General Assembly reflects such a mutual dependency between clergy and laity—with both having equal authority at the International General Assembly.

THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP.

The International General Assembly, from its beginning, has focused on fellowship within the Church. From its infancy, the Church of God has been noted for the close bonds of fellowship that exist among its members. Perhaps nowhere is this seen more than at the biennial Assemblies as members and ministers from around the world—many of whom have been isolated in far-flung ministry outreaches in remote areas of the globe—warmly greet their brothers and sisters in the Lord. For many years, those who have planned the International General Assembly have done so with the idea of providing opportunities for both ministerial and family fellowship.

THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY REFLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY OF PURPOSE.

The International General Assembly has become the event that gives platforms to those themes and projects that direct the various projects and ministries of the Church. During the past few decades, general ministry strategies and outreaches that have had a great impact on the movement's future and direction have been introduced to the Church's constituency at the International General Assembly. Thus, as the International General Assembly delegates embrace these initiatives, a singleness of purpose is forged that is carried back to the local church where the strategies and outreaches introduced at the International General Assembly are implemented.

Any collection of people that is faced with accomplishing a complex task faces two issues: (1) How to divide up the labor, and (2) How to coordinate the efforts. How this is done is the heart of the Church of God's unity of purpose.

1. *The need exists for periodic review of issues facing the church.* The International General Assembly provides a periodic opportunity for the Church to review those matters of doctrine, polity, and mission that are at the very core of its existence. No other forum exists in the Church where every member has an equal privilege to be present and to participate in the decision-making process as the Church formulates its structure and enunciates its beliefs.
2. *The International General Assembly reflects the democracy of the body.* From the very start, laity and clergy have had equal voices at the International General Assembly. The International General Assembly has expressly stated that it "grants to its laity the same voice that it affords all credentialed ministers during the International General Assembly sessions." As will be discussed later, there is no delegated authority that has priority at

the International General Assembly. It is open to all Church of God members who wish to attend and express themselves. The *Minutes* of the International General Assembly expressly state:

Each member has the right to speak on every question. However, he cannot make a second speech on the same question as long as any member who has not spoken on the question desires the floor. (*Minutes*, S2. Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 1. International General Assembly, *Parliamentary Procedure*.)

3. *The International General Assembly reflects an emphasis on worship and celebration.* As has been shown already, the primary purpose of the International General Assembly is to search the Scripture and to deliberate issues pertaining to the doctrine, practices, and polity of the Church. However, Pentecostal worship has always been an important part of the Assembly. Anointed preaching, joyous singing, and Spirit-filled celebration are eagerly anticipated highlights of each International General Assembly.
4. *The International General Assembly reflects a cognitive purpose as a denomination.* Cognitive purpose refers to those things that mold expectations and help assign meaning to experiences. It is the International General Assembly that chooses leaders, decides how to divide into divisions, defines the rules and procedures that are to be followed, and decides the basic values of the church. The International General Assembly decides what is rewarded, what is ignored, and what is punished.

The International General Assembly, being the highest body with authority to govern the affairs of the Church of God, becomes the pattern by which the general church, states, districts, and local churches conduct business.

Establishing the International General Assembly

According to historian, Dr. Charles W. Conn, the first matter to be discussed by the International General Assembly was the nature of the new church.

Was the General Assembly to be legislative, formulating rules and bylaws by which to govern itself? Should it be headed by executive powers, steering and initiating its activities? Or should it be judicial, governing itself by common interpretation of the Scriptures? (*Like a Mighty Army: Definitive Edition*, p. 76)

Obviously, these three concepts of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—represent the three branches of the United States government. However, it is important to note that the founders of our nation referenced Isaiah 33:22 as foundation for such a decision:

For the Lord is our *judge*, the Lord is our *lawgiver*, the Lord is our *king*, (*NKJV*). (Judicial, Legislative, Executive)

The decision was made at the first General Assembly that “we do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body but judicial only.” (*Like a Mighty Army: Definitive Edition*, p. 76)

This principle is held today more in *theory* than in practice. Obviously, many of the rules and principles adopted by subsequent General Assemblies would be more legislative than judicial. However, the idea that it is the opinion of the *delegates* and not a *law* that is held inviolate is still very much in practice at the International General Assembly.

More and more the annual gathering or “Assembly” became the focus of the Church of God activities. It was at these gatherings that decisions were made concerning church polity, government, and doctrine. It is important to note that these decisions were made, not by the ministers alone, but by *all* members of the Church—laity and clergy—with each having an equal voice in the affairs of the body.

Although there have been many changes made in the General Assembly over the years, the International General Assembly remains the highest authority in decisions pertaining to the doctrine, practices, and polity of the Church of God. According to the *Minutes* of the International General Assembly:

The International General Assembly of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee, U.S.A.) is that organized body with full power and authority to designate the teaching, government, principles, and practices of all the local churches composing said Assembly. (*Minutes*, S3. International General Assembly, I. Definition.)

This position is foundational to an understanding of the government of the Church of God. It is also vital in our understanding of the work of the International General Council.

COMPOSITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. *A biennial meeting.* For 40 years, 1906–1946, the General Assembly was an annual event. Beginning with the 1948 General Assembly in Birmingham, Alabama, it became a biennial meeting. Although there has been discussion from time to time about changing to a four-year interval between Assemblies, a majority of the Church has continued to favor meeting biennially.

2. *Arrangements and place left to the Executive Council.* The International General Assembly empowers the International General Executive Council to name the time when the Assembly will be held and to designate the city where it will convene. However, the size of the body limits the choice of cities that can adequately host the International General Assembly.

3. *To consider all recommendations of the International General Council.* The International General Assembly is given no authority to originate measures. It is the responsibility of the International General Assembly to receive measures passed to it by the International General Council. All nominations and recommendations coming to the Assembly from the International General Council become the property of the International General Assembly for deliberation, discussion, and final disposition.

4. *Composed of all Church of God members present and registered at the International General Assembly.* At the International General Assembly, there is no distinction of membership. Laity

and clergy, male and female, have the same recognition and authority. The *Minutes* of the International General Assembly state:

The International General Assembly is composed of all members and ministers of the Church of God 16 years of age and above. Members and ministers of the Church of God present and registered at the International General Assembly shall comprise its voting constituency. (*Minutes*, S2. Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 1. International General Assembly, *Members*)

5. *Exists out of the local congregation and represents that body.* While all individuals present at the International General Assembly are members of a local church, the Church of God does not have a delegated Assembly. In other words, delegates are not selected by local congregations to represent them at the International General Assembly.

6. *Elects the officers of the Church.* The International General Assembly elects all the general officers of the Church except the Council of Eighteen, which is elected by the International General Council.

The International General Assembly elects the general overseer, the assistant general overseers, the secretary general, the director of Youth and Discipleship, the assistant director of Youth and Discipleship, the director of World Missions, and the assistant director of World Missions (*Minutes*, S2, Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 1. International General Assembly, *Elections*).

The International General Council nominates all these officers. Although nomination by the Council usually is viewed as tantamount to election, the Church's officers are truly elected only after the International General Assembly has voiced its approval of the Council's nominees.

7. *The officers of the International General Assembly.* According to the International General Assembly *Minutes*, "the officers of the International General Assembly shall consist of the moderator and a secretary" (*Minutes*, S2. Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 1. International General Assembly, *Officers, Committees*).

"The general overseer shall preside as moderator" (*Ibid.*). In his role as moderator, the general overseer appoints parliamentarians to serve during the International General Assembly meetings. The moderator also appoints the members of committees called for by the International General Assembly.

Also according to the International General Assembly *Minutes*, "the secretary general shall serve the Assembly as secretary" (*Ibid.*) The International General Assembly secretary is responsible for recording actions taken by the Assembly and is the custodian of the records of the Assembly.

Parliamentary procedure has become a very essential part of understanding the workings of the International General Assembly.

Dr. Hollis Gause, in his book *Church of God Polity* states:

The chief purpose of the General Assembly is to study the Scriptures and to determine the Biblical position in matters of polity, doctrine and life. The decisions made are subject to biennial review, and in this viewpoint all the decisions made by all previous General Assemblies are reviewed, changed and/or reaffirmed (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1958, p. 92).

The question that Church of God members need to keep asking is, "Are we remaining true to the purpose and function of the General Assembly?"

It is obvious that in practice the Church of God has moved away from the early principle that it is "judicial," not "legislative." Nevertheless, the Church should hold to that principle in *theory* if not in *practice*.

While the Church strives to be relevant to its culture and environment, it must never forget that it is a *church*, and that its highest responsibility is to be faithful to Holy Scripture. Thus, the Church must continually search the Scripture to see if its government, polity, and practices are in keeping with God's Word.

The Church has no right to change anything simply because it is out of step with society. But, on the other hand, it has no responsibility to continue doing things the way they have always been done simply because they have been a part of tradition.

The Bible—God's Word—is the sole authority, and should always be the final word on the beliefs and practices of the Church of God. Hopefully, the Church will recover its original high principle of searching the Word for God's direction for this movement as the first and primary reason for having an International General Assembly of the Church of God.

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS

The International General Council functions in a subordinate role to the International General Assembly. All of its actions, with the exception of the election of the Council of Eighteen and the alteration of its own bylaws, are recommendations to the International General Assembly, and are not final until approved by the International General Assembly.

The International General Council meets biennially, and concurrently with the International General Assembly. The membership of the International General Council is limited to the ordained bishops of the Church of God. Ordained ministers, exhorters and laity attend the International General Council sessions, but only as observers. The International General Assembly *Minutes* state:

The International General Council is composed of all ordained bishops and shall comprise its voting ranks. Ordained ministers, exhorters, and laity shall be privileged to sit in the International General Council, without voting privileges. (S4. International General Council, I. Selection.)

Members of the International General Council do not have a delegated relationship to any group or segment of the church. Each voting member, as a duly ordained bishop of the Church of God, is, therefore, subject to the rule of the International General Assembly.

By his speech and action in the International General Council, the member implies no authority beyond that of his own action. (Although, some assume to speak for other people.)

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL OFFICERS

Two required officers of the International General Council are the moderator and the secretary.

The general overseer serves as moderator of the International General Council. The moderator may also appoint parliamentarians to serve during the International General Council meetings. He also appoints members of committees called for by the International General Council.

The secretary general serves as the International General Council secretary. He is responsible for recording actions taken by the International General Council and is the custodian of the records of the Council.

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL FUNCTIONS

The International General Assembly assigns the International General Council three primary functions:

1. Meet biennially to consider and prepare such recommendations as are Scriptural and proper in all matters pertaining to the welfare of the Church. Such recommendations are to be presented to the International General Assembly for final disposition.
2. Nominate to the International General Assembly the general overseer, his assistants, the secretary general, the director of Youth and Discipleship, the assistant director of Youth and Discipleship, the director of World Missions, and the assistant director of World Missions.
3. Elect the members of the Council of Eighteen.

The International General Assembly does not originate its own agenda. The International General Council presents all measures that are acted on by the International General Assembly. This origination is accomplished in two ways.

First, the International Executive Council prepares an agenda for the business of the International General Council. It is important to note that the agenda items presented by the International Executive Council do not become measures until approved by the International General Council. There is no provision for the International Executive Council to take any measure directly to the International General Assembly, but always through the International General Council.

Second, measures may be originated through the submission of motions to the Motions Committee during the International General Council. Concerning the motions process, the *Minutes* of the International General Assembly state:

Any new business shall be presented to the chairman of the motions committee, which committee shall receive, classify, clarify, eliminate duplication, and dispatch for placement on the agenda following the completion of the printed agenda. Any new business presented to the motions committee shall be presented in typewritten form not later than 2 p.m. of the third day of the International General Council. (S2, Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 2. International General Council, Agenda 4.)

As stated, the printed agenda always takes precedence. Those motions that are presented to the Motions Committee during the Council session are considered only after the official agenda has been completed.

Any member of the Church of God—laity or clergy—has the right to submit items to be considered for inclusion on the International General Council agenda. Usually those items are sent to the general overseer or to the International Executive Committee, but all items that concern the International General Council or International General Assembly actions are submitted to the International Executive Council for consideration.

The business of the International General Council is predominately guided by the official agenda, which is prepared by the International Executive Council. This agenda is printed and mailed to all ordained bishops 30 days prior to the convening of the International General Council sessions, with the exception of those items that pertain to the bylaws. Items dealing with the bylaws must be mailed to all ordained bishops 90 days prior to the opening of the International General Council sessions.

The agenda comes to the International General Council as the order of business for the Council in two broad categories of business: (1) Nominations and elections, and (2) Measures designed to affect the program, polity, faith, and practices of the Church.

Nominations and elections are always the first in order of business on the International General Council's agenda. Beginning with the nomination to the International General Assembly of the general overseer, the Council also nominates the general overseer's assistants, the secretary general, the director of Youth and Discipleship, the assistant director of Youth and Discipleship, the director of World Missions, and the assistant director of World Missions.

Once the nominations are completed, the Council elects the members of the Council of Eighteen. When the nominations and elections are completed, the items on the printed agenda are then presented for discussion.

The chief creedal statement of the Church of God is the Declaration of Faith. It is, consequently, the most difficult to change of all measures adopted by the International General Assembly. A proposed change in the Declaration of Faith must follow these steps in order to be considered by the International General Assembly:

1. The measure must first be submitted to the International Executive Council in writing 12 months prior to the regular session of the International General Council.
2. It then must pass the International Executive Council by a three-fourths majority vote.
3. After appearing on the International General Council agenda for consideration, the measure must pass by a three-fourths majority vote.
4. It must be published in the Church of God *Evangel* quarterly until the next regular session of the International General Assembly.
5. It is then presented to the International General Assembly for consideration.

Many protective measures have been put into place to guard against the "whimsical" changing of any of the fundamental principles that make up the statements of faith.

HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL

It was in the annual address at the General Assembly of 1915 that the general overseer introduced the idea of a "council of elders." Although much thought was given to the subject, no action was taken until the General Assembly of 1916, at which time the following measure was adopted:

That a body of elders be selected, whose duty it shall be to have jurisdiction over all questions of every nature that may properly come before them, their actions and decisions to be ratified by the Assembly in session. This body of elders to be composed of not less than twelve members and never more than seventy.

Notice the numbers “twelve” and “seventy.” These are obviously biblical numbers. The number 12 corresponded to the number of apostles. The number 70 corresponded to the 70 elders in Numbers 11:16 and to the 70 disciples sent out by the Lord in Luke 10:1.

Although provision was made in the General Assembly of 1916 for the Council of Twelve to be increased to as many as 70 members, it was not until the Assembly of 1921 that the matter was again discussed. Both A.J. Tomlinson and F.J. Lee apparently spoke compellingly from the Scriptures in favor of 70 elders. This was in addition to, rather than including, the Twelve.

The Council of Seventy (or “Other Seventy” as it was popularly called) was instituted, and for several years was a powerful and influential board. Then, in the 1929 General Assembly, a far-reaching measure was adopted. The Council of Seventy was abolished, and it was decided that all ordained bishops (then called bishops) should be considered councilors, thus forming a Bishops Council, which would convene each year preceding the General Assembly.

In the General Assemblies from 1906 to 1921, all business was discussed openly by the entire delegation. But after 1921, the business was discussed first by the Council of Twelve, then by the Council of Seventy, and finally was brought before the General Assembly.

With the 1929 ruling, the Council of Twelve would bring its recommendations to the Bishops Council, where they would be debated and accepted or rejected by a majority vote. Those measures adopted by the Bishops Council then became recommendations to the General Assembly. The measures passed by the General Assembly would become rulings and teachings of the church. This procedure remains essentially the same today, although the titles have changed.

Due to an increase in the number of councilors, the Council of Twelve is now the Council of Eighteen. The Supreme Council is known today as the International Executive Council. The Bishops Council has become the International General Council, leaving the International General Assembly as the only title that has remained the same.

REASONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

Of all people, Christians should have order in their business. Only eternity can register the consequences of our failure to appropriately conduct business.

Where are the rules that govern the International General Council sessions?

First, the Bible. One of the very first principles adopted by the Church of God was to accept “the whole Bible rightly divided, and the New Testament as the only rule for government and discipline” (CT1).

That foundational principle has not changed. Although other sources are considered for guidance, God’s Word stands above *any* and *all* human rules designed to help the Church do its business. No action is acceptable that is contrary to Scripture. The authority of the Bible is supreme. While it is true that decorum and courtesy are dealt with in *Robert’s Rules of Order*, Holy Scripture *mandates* them for our Christian testimony.

Second, the bylaws. The Church of God bylaws govern all business sessions. Every deliberative body has the right to enact whatever bylaws it deems necessary for the regulation of its own business. The Church of God has adopted some self-imposed rules for the manner in which it conducts business in the International General Council. Therefore, it cannot violate its own bylaws.

Third, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised. The International General Assembly has adopted *Robert's Rules of Order* as parliamentary authority. It is not an unalterable textbook for parliamentary order, rather, a manual for guidance, though certainly not a *perfect* one. In fact, parliamentary procedure is not a perfect system for doing business, but it is the best one that has been found.

According to a measure adopted by the International General Assembly,

The current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall serve as the official guide for the business of the International General Council in all matters to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with the bylaws of the International General Council. As a guide for the order of business, the agenda presented by the International Executive Council shall claim the attention of the Council first. (S2, Bylaws, Article VI, Governing Bodies, 2. International General Council, Agenda 3.)

The following general principles govern deliberation in the International General Council:

1. Business must be conducted in an orderly fashion.

When one participates in a deliberative assembly, he enters into an agreement with the other members to allow the will of the majority to prevail on all questions that come before the group.

Thomas Jefferson stressed the ideal when he said that the object of majority rule was to "consider the will of the society enounced by the majority of a single vote, as sacred as if unanimous."

2. The minority must not be suppressed.

Though the majority rules, its power is not absolute. As we know, the majority is not always right. If everyone but one agreed on a subject, the majority would not be justified in silencing that one anymore than one individual, should he have the power, would be justified in silencing the entire group.

3. Every member has the right to be heard and to hear what others have to say.

Debate is essential to good decisions. Permitting members to express dissenting views is not only fair, it is essential. Only when we have heard all sides can we make wise decisions.

I have had the opportunity to sit with the General Council as a voting member since 1966. I have also had the privilege of moderating the General Council. While it is certainly much easier to "sit" with the Council than to "moderate" the Council, I can honestly say that I thoroughly enjoyed the process. I am amazed how God has helped us through some of the difficult and complicated situations we have faced as a movement. I am thoroughly convinced that God helps those who endeavor to apply themselves to reach the best possible decisions for the body (R. Lamar Vest, "General Council Organization and Functions," *Knowing Your Church*, Homer G. Rhea, ed. [Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2001] p. 92).

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS

International Offices

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The word *organization* is more than a subjective term by which to describe the denomination and its labors. It is the agency, the conduit; it is the vehicle by which the members do the work of God on earth. It represents the network of ligaments and nerves that bind everyone together and make it possible to function in unison.

Most organizational authorities realize that the right kind of structure permits the performance of large-scale tasks that could not be accomplished if taken for granted.

Organization is the present earthly manifestation of the church. This doesn't mean, however, that the Church of God's organizational structures are perfect. It doesn't mean that they are fixed and unchangeable. Nor does it preclude evaluating and seeking better and more up-to-date methods for doing the tasks the Church is called to do.

Members of the Church of God need to honestly answer the question, "What business is the denominational headquarters really in?" The denominational product is what the people and pastors are being asked to underwrite. The rationale for general church offices cannot be separated from the denomination's Statement of Vision, Statement of Mission, and Commitments to Our Mission and Vision (see pp. 164-170).

RATIONALE FOR GENERAL CHURCH OFFICES:

The rationale for having a General Headquarters structure include:

1. Providing services/resources for local congregations that help facilitate and achieve the mission.

This is the first and foremost explanation for having a general church structure. Anyway you look at it, the transformation of individual lives—those affected by the gospel—is the only work of the Church. That transformation takes place in the local church. Thus, everything that is done must focus on providing services that undergird the evangelistic and discipleship ministries of the local church.

2. Caring for the training and welfare of the clergy.

The role of clergy in our society is greatly changing. There are some things, however, which have remained constant throughout the history of the Church. As long as there is a Church, there will always be the demand for a called, trained, and healthy clergy. It is the responsibility of the denominational headquarters to see that this need is met.

3. Carrying out ministries beyond the capability of the local congregations.

There are just some things that a local church cannot do effectively by itself: such as higher education, world evangelization, ministerial preparation and credentialing, and publishing of curriculum and materials.

4. Providing creative and trailblazing leadership.

If the Church of God is to be a vital part of the last-days movement of God on this earth, it must have leadership, at every level of the Church, which will move the denomination in the direction that the constituency would not do if left alone. The denominational headquarters plays a key role in helping provide this kind of leadership.

5. Recognizing, honoring, and rewarding those who faithfully serve.

Every organization must have some means by which those who faithfully serve are cared for. An organization gets more and better service if it rewards. Urbanus, Apelles, Tryphena, and Tryphosa were not the most famous New Testament disciples, but they must have beamed when the apostle Paul mentioned their hard work in Romans 16. It is important to acknowledge those who do well.

6. Making necessary alterations or configuration adjustments in structure in order to best accomplish the mandate of Christ.

Someone recently asked, "Why is there so much talk about structure?" Very simple: structure is important because *form* dictates *function*. Polity reflects theology.

The Church is an organism and the structure of the Church, if it is to be effective, must be flexible to provide not only for providential developments but also for the changing times. The rapid pace of change forces the Church to continually evaluate its structure to make sure it is not restricting the operation of the Holy Spirit or the fulfillment of its mission.

There is a danger of placing a higher value on stability than on innovation. To focus on the institution rather than on mission is the great danger of any organization. It is imperative that the Church of God define its role in the Great Commission and devote its full energies and resources to fulfilling that role. Cutting through traditional barriers to get to the harvest must be the number one priority. Prophetic voices must continue to call the Church back to being the church as defined by Scripture.

Structure and organization will change—the Mission is constant. Because the church is the body of Christ, and since the members who make up the Church of God are a distinctive part of that body, they must constantly renew their commitment to the mission and purpose of the Church and to its particular role as a denomination in the greater church body. This calls for the leadership to periodically review the way the Church goes about its work. It calls for constant fine-tuning of the structure or possibly even restructuring.

Ministry is a word which needs to be taken more seriously; and from that perspective, hopefully the Church of God will commit to becoming a Church that actively commits its resources and efforts to fulfilling the Great Commission rather than to any accumulation of capital or emphasis upon mere statistics or upon those things which are valued by the world.

INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Early in its history, the Church of God discovered that it had erred in committing so much responsibility and authority to one man. Until the General Assembly of 1922, the general overseer alone was responsible for general Church leadership. In a September 1921 journal entry, General Overseer Tomlinson wrote that he was filling the offices of general overseer, editor and publisher, Publishing House business manager, superintendent of the Orphanage and Children's Home. He noted that he worked an average of 18 hours a day and that he hardly ever found the time to go to town.

At the General Assembly of 1922 (the 17th), important action was taken. A Committee on Better Government brought a report to the Assembly, which resulted in two new offices being created: an editor and publisher and a superintendent of education. The two men who filled these offices would serve with the general overseer as an Executive Committee, which would be responsible for managing and appropriating Church funds, appointing all state overseers and arranging for the General Assembly. It was also decided that the Executive Committee would sit with the Council of Twelve at least once a year, and that these two groups would comprise the Supreme Council of the Church of God. The construction of the Executive Committee has changed several times since the 1922 General Assembly.

Today the International Executive Committee consists of the general overseer, first assistant general overseer, second assistant general overseer, third assistant general overseer, and secretary general.

The International General Executive Committee acts in the general interests of the Church, maintaining the executive functions of the Church. The International General Executive Committee sits with the Council of Eighteen to form the International Executive Council.

The general overseer serves as chairman of the International General Executive Committee. He assigns executive portfolios to members of the International General Executive Committee which are subject to periodic review by the International Executive Council. Members of the International General Executive Committee serve as liaisons for the general overseer to the various divisions, boards, and committees.

PRESUPPOSITIONS

The presuppositions of the church are . . .

1. The central reality of the Church is always to be *ekklesia*—a called out, faithful people, surrounded by a hostile environment.

2. Whatever paradigm is embraced regarding the Church, it must be distinct from the world. *A peculiar people*, can be defined as those whose peculiarity has to do with caring for and serving that world for God.
3. The focus of the Church must always be on mission. Organization, polity, finances, growth are all-important—but *mission* is essential.
4. God is always calling His people to be more than they have been. They can never drive down stakes and build permanent temples in the wilderness while God is in the process of leading them to the Promised Land. They can never be content with “playing it safe.” For the Church, a state of satisfaction marks the beginning of decline. Conquest over the kingdoms of the world is the only condition of security. While the body moves toward a new understanding of “church” it is important that they not be trapped in an unrealistic memory of the past. Fictitious memories surround God’s people like ruins of an old civilization and hinder them from attempting new ventures. Chances are, the past was not really what it was remembered to be.

What the church of today must face, realistically, is that the church of the past was no paradise community. The Epistles describe a people who experienced fractures and conflict, anger and division, as well as peace and joy. When one is surprised by the disappointing moral behavior of good Christian people—and especially the scandals created by some of their ministers—he/she can read how the people in the Corinthian church lived.

At best, the story of God’s people—Old Testament, New Testament, early church history, now—is a story of a troublesome pilgrimage. The Lord has chosen to reveal His truth progressively. Thus, that body which represents Him on earth—the church—is continuously in reform.

State and District Organization

One of the great strengths of the Church of God, like other groups of churches that work together for common goals, is what it cannot do alone, it *can* do by cooperating together. Most church groups cooperate in one of two basic manners: they are either presbyterian in government or episcopal in government.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

The government referred to as presbyterian is often called *congregational*, because the local congregation is sovereign in its decisions; the episcopal form of governance is *centralized*, or hierarchical. In actuality, the Church of God combines features of both types, but it is largely episcopal in form . . . centralized.

The New Testament never makes a strong, definitive case for a distinct form of church governance; however, the Church believes it sees marks of a centralized structure. As the Book of Acts records, the leaders came together for decision-making regarding doctrine and practice. They

recognized the authority of the moderator of the council who communicated the findings of the council to other local churches. Leaders like Paul instructed leaders like Titus to make pastoral appointments in areas of their oversight. (Various church groups, of course, put their own interpretations on these events.)

STATE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

The leader of the Church at the state level is the state overseer. Although the Church uses the term “state,” the geographic extent supervised by the overseer may be greater or lesser than a “state.” Some states, because of the number of churches, are partitioned into two divisions. Other states, because they have a smaller number of churches, are grouped together and spoken of as a “region.” At least one state has three different overseers, with each supervising a different language or culture group.

State overseers are appointed for two-year terms by the International Executive Committee, guided by a vote of ministers within the state. A man may continue as a state overseer for 12 successive years; however, after two terms in a state, he must receive at least a two-thirds majority vote of the ministers. Following 12 years of service, the overseer may be appointed again after having served two years in some other ministry capacity.

The overseer is evaluated by the ministers in the state, using a form provided for that purpose, which asks questions about his ability and performance.

What does a state overseer do? The overseer’s job description includes the following duties:

1. Arranges for general evangelistic work in the state.
2. Appoints pastors and district overseers.
3. Approves the organization of new churches.
4. Approves the purchase or construction of church-owned facilities.
5. Officiates at ordination services.
6. Processes applicants for ministry.
7. Takes care of the normal administrative matters pertaining to the operation of the Church in the state and makes reports of churches and ministerial activities.

The *Minutes of the General Assembly* spells out in detail all that is required of the state overseer.

The overseer works with a board of councilors who are elected by their peers in the state. The size of the council ranges from four to 12 members, depending on the number of churches in the state. They meet periodically; in some states quarterly, and in others monthly or at other intervals.

The state council works with the overseer to fashion a state budget and to manage the affairs of the state.

Some states have two other leaders, a state director of Youth and Discipleship and a director of State Evangelism and Missions. Their duties are spelled out in the *Minutes of the International General Assembly*. These individuals are selected for two-year terms and may remain eight years in one state. Each has a board elected by his ministerial peers that helps to plan and implement his respective ministry.

Youth directors work with state leaders and local pastors to provide a program of Christian education and youth ministry to meet the needs of the state. This usually includes directing training events, conducting youth camps, providing resources, and offering help as needed.

Evangelism and Missions directors assist the state overseer in directing a general program of evangelism in the state. They typically motivate a ministry of church planting and encourage evangelism activity throughout the state. They coordinate the ministry of evangelists in their areas.

Other boards that operate in most states include a State Board of Ministerial Development, a State World Missions Board and a State Music Board. The Ministerial Development Board is the group that plans and implements the Calling And Ministry Studies (CAMS) and the Ministerial Internship Program (MIP), as well as other ministry-training activities in the state.

Another key individual in each state office is the state secretary-treasurer. This individual maintains the financial records of the state under the overseer's supervision and makes required reports to the State Council and the International Offices, and makes records available for audit.

States have fixed meetings that are on the calendar each year, including a state camp meeting or state convention, usually held in the summer months, and a prayer conference or mid-winter camp meeting, normally scheduled in the winter months. These meetings have their roots in American church history much earlier than the founding of the Church of God. The meetings are planned primarily for evangelism of the unsaved and inspiration of Christian workers. The normal format for a camp meeting is a week-long gathering at a central location, with Bible teaching and preaching in the morning and a preaching, worship service in the evening, usually with strong evangelistic content.

The winter meeting is similar, although usually shorter.

One of the benefits of state meetings is the opportunity to fellowship with friends and colleagues that might not be seen for months at a time.

States also typically schedule training events—at times centrally situated and at times conducted in various regions—for Christian education in general, for Sunday school, for evangelism and church growth, or for ministerial enrichment. A few states also have arrangements with Lee University or the Theological Seminary to conduct extension classes at key locations.

Additionally, some states conduct pastoral retreats for pastors and their wives. Some of them also sponsor separate women's meetings.

DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

Each state is subdivided into geographic regions called *districts*. A district is a group of churches located in the same general area. A district may be as small as three or four churches or as large as 17 to 20. The state overseer appoints the pastor of one of the churches as the district overseer.

The district overseer functions something like an assistant to the state overseer. He encourages the pastors and churches on the district to carry out the emphases of the state program in their settings. If a building project or land or building purchase is anticipated, the district overseer works as a go-between for the pastor and the state overseer.

What happens on a given district is quite varied from place to place. In some areas, the people on the district rarely see each other and have few activities. In other areas, a monthly district function such as a youth rally or revival or fellowship-type meeting is part of the usual fare.

District overseers at times receive communication directly from the International Offices when their help is enlisted in the promotion of timely programs and ministries. One former general overseer referred to district overseers as "the sergeants" of the Church of God.

Each district also has a district youth director, appointed by the district overseer, to coordinate state-level youth and CE ministries at the district and local church levels.

Here are a couple of suggestions with regard to the state and district structures:

1. *Seek opportunities to be involved in state activities.* One of the benefits of being in the ministry is the mutual spiritual stimulation that occurs when men and women of God meet together to talk about the things of God and church. State meetings afford those opportunities. A few preachers will probably choose a "Lone Ranger" approach to ministry; but a pastor's life will be richer and fuller when it is blessed with collegial friendships.
2. *Look for opportunities to get to know personally state- and district-level leaders.* All pastors are challenged by the work of the ministry and the demands that the church places upon them. They can benefit by association with leaders who can share experience, counsel, and friendship. The state and district leaders are busy and rarely have time for unscheduled interruptions that might tie up a lot of time, but there are few indeed who will not respond openly and readily to overtures of friendship from their pastors. Quite frankly, the leaders also benefit when they get to know the pastors and become familiar with their work. Remember the scripture that says "Iron sharpens iron."

3. *Look for ways to cooperate with fellow ministers.* At the beginning of this chapter, it was suggested that one of the strengths of the organization is that “it can do together what it could not possibly do alone.” Surely the Lord had the same idea in mind when in His high priestly prayer, He prayed in anticipation that believers all may be one.

The Local Church

This section takes a look at the local church government and how these churches are structured for leadership and administration. The polity of the Church of God involves more than the larger superstructure of its centralized government, including general offices, state offices, and local churches. Within each local body there is a form of government, and that government should be followed because it is established for a purpose. Pastors should reflect upon how their church is set up and consider the reasons for the church’s structure. Sometimes these matters are considered mundane, and pastors do not always appreciate exactly why a church does what it does or why it is structured the way it is. But they need to understand that there are reasons why the church is the way it is.

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The pastor is at the highest level of the local church’s pattern of government and structure. He is appointed by the state overseer. From a Biblical standpoint, the pastor’s role is to be the head elder or undershepherd of the congregation. As the head elder, there are other elders who serve with him. That is the biblical pattern established in the New Testament by the apostle Paul who had elders appoint other elders in various churches. Elders represent more than credentialed ministers; they include other leaders in the church as well. The Church of God has largely recognized the role of elders to be exclusively for men. Part of the reason for this has to do with the use of exclusively male language in the New Testament to describe the role of an elder. On the other hand, the New Testament speaks of the deaconess, indicating that the role of a deacon may be carried out by male or female.

Many congregations employ elders to do ministry in the church. They have a spiritual function, such as praying for the sick, as admonished by the apostle James, who wrote: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up” (James 5:14, 15, *NKJV*).

Elders also have some administrative tasks. They have a teaching role in the congregation, teaching by example in word and deed. They are shepherds caring for the congregation. Different churches use different models for this biblically established office. Many churches draw from their pool of elders to fill leadership roles.

THE ROLE OF CHURCH AND PASTOR’S COUNCIL

The primary leadership role in the local church, outside that of the pastor, is the Church and Pastor’s Council. The local Church and Pastor’s Council is made up of individuals who serve

the church faithfully. In some congregations, the Council is made up of elders. The members of the Council are selected by the congregation and they serve to oversee specific areas of the local church. In different churches, their functions, activities, and responsibilities may vary.

The members of the Council are to be elected biennially. Congregations have the option to set up the Council on a rotation basis, so that a man may serve only two to four years and then rotate off for a season and another person be elected. The size of a council is largely dependent upon the size of a church. Some smaller churches may not find it advantageous to have a Church and Pastor's Council. However, as a church grows to about 100 members, it should have a Council of at least three members. If the church's membership is 100–225, it should have five counselors. From 226–350, it should have not less than seven counselors. If the membership is from 350–500, it should have not less than nine counselors. And if the membership is 500 or over, there should not be less than 12 counselors. These individuals are guided in their meetings by the pastor, who serves as the chairman. No meeting of the Council should be called without the pastor. In fact, the *General Assembly Minutes* forbids the calling of a meeting of the Council without the pastor being present, except in cases where the state overseer meets with the Council in the pastor's absence. For example, if a matter pertaining to the pastor needs to be discussed, such as a pastoral change or an issue that involves the pastor and church, then the state overseer will preside over the meeting. He meets with the Church and Pastor's Council because they represent the local church.

The Church and Pastor's Council has specific qualifications. Not every individual qualifies to serve on the Council. This is true because of the sensitivity of the issues that the Council deals with and the level of leadership required. There are specific qualifications that a member of the Council should adhere to. First of all, members should be loyal to the church and uphold its teachings. This is only logical. Those involved in the leadership of any institution should accept the teachings and beliefs of that institution.

The second qualification to be a member of the Church and Pastor's Council is for a person to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Church of God is a Pentecostal church, one that believes in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Members of the Council should have received this Holy Spirit baptism because they need the help of the Spirit in discerning and making right decisions on behalf of the church.

The third qualification to be a member of the Church and Pastor's Council is for an individual to be faithful in tithing. The Council makes many decisions about financial matters, so it is important that they be personally engaged in stewardship. Such participation indicates that the members understand the importance of their roles.

The fourth requirement of a Council member is faithfulness in church attendance. The individual who serves on the Council is a leader in the church, and he cannot lead if he is never there.

The final requirement of a Council member is to be an individual who is willing to work in harmony with the local, state, and general church's program. A Council member should (1) be one who reflects a cooperative attitude toward the progress of the church, (2) have the best interest of the church in mind and not resist the progress of the church, and (3) have the same attitude toward

the general and state programs as well. This does not mean a Council member should be a yes-person. The individual should stand for what is right, and when things are not right, the individual should stand up and voice concerns. There is a difference between being an individual who is obstinate, and one who is raising a legitimate voice of concern.

What does the Church and Pastor's Council do? The Council has various responsibilities. Under the direction of the pastor, the Council is supposed to promote the program of the Church of God as expressed by the general and state leadership. Programs are brought from the General Assembly for the good of all local congregations. The Council is supposed to effectuate those programs since they are part of the larger thrust of the Church of God. Secondly, the Council is supposed to work in harmony with the pastor and assist him/her when called upon in instituting and directing the local church program. There are three areas where the Church and Pastor's Council is involved.

1. The Council has a responsibility in spiritual matters. Unfortunately, many churches emphasize only the financial or administrative tasks of the Council. But the primary area of responsibility for the Council member is the spiritual well-being of the church. This responsibility is listed first in the *General Assembly Minutes* purposely. The *Minutes* instructs the Council, under the direction of the pastor, to encourage spiritual growth in the local congregation by emphasizing Bible reading, prayer, family devotions, tithing and giving, Christian service, and witnessing. These are disciplines that make up a Christian's lifestyle. Not only should they mark the lifestyle of the Council member, but also he should have a passion to see these practices followed by all members of the local church. This is basically what the programs of the denomination are all about—developing and maturing believers. Paul had this in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians:

And He Himself [Christ] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13, *NKJV*).

This passage gives an understanding of the spiritual nature of the Council. Its primary function is not to review budgets, but to care for the spiritual needs of the congregation.

In some churches, the Council may be involved in church discipline. The pastor may call upon certain members of the Council to help him in dealing with unruly members after he has gone to them individually and then with one other elder in accordance with Matthew 18. If the individual still does not respond, then Jesus says, present him to the church. Sometimes this means that the Church and Pastor's Council will deal with the individual as a whole body and try to bring correction so that there may be restoration.

2. The Church and Pastor's Council has a responsibility to work with the pastor in financial matters. It should be involved in approving major disbursements of church funds. Every church has occasional disbursements that are not large enough to take to a church conference, but too large for the pastor to make the decision alone. Of course, disbursements of the

largest kind need to go to the congregation for approval. For instance, if the church is considering a long-term debt or is going to purchase or sell property, that needs the congregation's approval. Another thing, the Council has no jurisdiction over monies raised by the Women's Ministries Department of the local church. These funds are disbursed by the Women's Ministries Board in conjunction with the pastor.

3. The Church and Pastor's Council assists the pastor in the care of the physical property owned by the church. Under the direction of the pastor, the Council provides and maintains proper building facilities for the congregation and a proper residence for the pastor. The Council is responsible to make sure that all church-owned properties are insured, and that the tax-exempt status of the church is not lost. It is the responsibility of the Council to make sure that a parsonage is provided for the pastor or that the church pays him a housing allotment.

Those are the primary functions of the Church and Pastor's Council. These tasks are very broad and general; therefore, it needs to be understood that at various times the Council may be called upon to help the pastor make certain decisions. This is another reason why the qualifications of a member of the Council is so important. These individuals need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to have divine assistance in helping the pastor make decisions where their input is needed.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TREASURER

Another important role in the local church is that of the church treasurer. Churches of various sizes have different descriptions of what the church treasurer's responsibilities are, but some primary responsibilities are given in the *General Assembly Minutes*. The church treasurer serves the local church, not as a decision maker, but in an administrative function. At an earlier time, the treasurer was elected, but now the person is appointed by the pastor and is confirmed by the Church and Pastor's Council and/or by the congregation. The church treasurer or a member of the Council may serve as the recording secretary of the Church and Pastor's Council. The treasurer may serve on the Council; may serve apart from the Council; may serve as the secretary of the Council or may not.

The role of the church treasurer is important because the person deals with the church's money as well as certain reports on the progress of the church. The qualifications for church treasurer are consistent with his or her responsibilities and are in many ways similar to those required of Council members. First, the treasurer must be a loyal member of the church and adhere to its teachings. Second, the person must be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Third, the individual must be a faithful tither. Fourth, the person must be faithful in attending the services of the church. Fifth, the church treasurer performs duties under the supervision of the pastor and with the pastor's approval. It is not the role of the church treasurer to be an antagonist to, or alter ego of, the pastor. Rather, the treasurer is to work alongside the pastor assisting in whatever way the administrative tasks require. Sixth, the treasurer must work in harmony with the church's program and reflect a cooperative attitude with reference to the progress of the church. This is in keeping with the mandate that is upon the Council. Finally, any exceptions to the above qualifications have to be approved by the administrative bishop. The *Minutes* are very clear that if there are any exceptions to this rule, they

must come from some higher level of authority because of the importance of the position of church treasurer.

What does a church treasurer do? The treasurer is to maintain an accurate record of the daily activities of the church and of certain vital information that pertains to the local church organization. These responsibilities include keeping an accurate membership roll with all the names and addresses of the church members current. The treasurer is responsible for transferring memberships from one Church of God to another. Further, the treasurer is to maintain an accurate record of all church conferences, as well as a record of all the major disbursements that come from the funds of the church. Now, keep in mind that larger churches may delegate some of these disbursement responsibilities to an accounting staff. But the treasurer has a responsibility to make sure that there are financial statements available for quarterly conferences and that minutes are taken of these meetings. In a sense, the treasurer is the caretaker of the church's records and therefore the preserver of the history of the church. The treasurer is also expected to prepare financial reports on a quarterly basis for the Council and for the church and prepare weekly reports for the pastor. If the pastor needs to make a decision based upon the availability of finances, the treasurer must provide all pertinent information. Finally, the church treasurer must make sure that the monthly reports to general and state offices are filled out properly, mailed in a timely fashion, and a copy kept and maintained for future reference. This is a very important task that ultimately comes under the church treasurer's responsibilities.

A church should never have only one individual counting the money, making the deposits, and then writing the checks. That is not a secure system. The Bible admonishes believers to avoid the very appearance of evil, so the treasurers need to conduct themselves in a way that no one can think evil of their good. There should always be more individuals than just the treasurer involved in handling the church's money, and there should be a financial system in place.

THE ROLE OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

The *Minutes* allows for the formation of a Finance Committee. The individuals on this Committee are the handlers of the money. When an offering is received or money comes into the church, it is handled in a specific way. The members of this Committee must be loyal members of the church just like the church treasurer and the Council members. They should be baptized in the Holy Spirit, faithful in tithing and giving, regular church attenders, and work in harmony with the programs of the church, and any exceptions to these qualifications must be approved by the state overseer.

What are the duties of the Finance Committee? Basically, this Committee is to receive and count all monies and prepare funds for deposit. Since it is always best to have more than one person taking care of the finances of the church, this Committee should consist of two or three members.

Some churches may have a Finance Committee that operates separately from but in close proximity to the Church and Pastor's Council. Its function is to help the church, the Church and Pastor's Council, and the pastor to understand the financial statements of the church.

THE ROLE OF RECORDS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

In addition to the records kept by the clerk in the daily operation of the church, federal regulations require that certain kinds of data be kept and maintained in local churches. For instance, forms need to be reported for earnings of the church staff, as well as forms that protect the tax-exempt status of the church. If a pastor has a question about whether the church is in full compliance with the requirements of the federal government, the pastor should contact the district overseer or administrative bishop.

In addition to meeting federal regulations, these documents are important to the local church for historical reasons. If the church maintains good records, researchers working 50 or 100 years from now can determine how the congregation developed over the years. These documents should be kept in a safe place where they will not be damaged even if there is a fire or a flood in the area. Also, these records need to be kept in a way that will preserve them. Anyone desiring to know more about how that may be done could contact the director of a local museum or the director of the Pentecostal Research Center in Cleveland, Tennessee. Either of these sources could be helpful in showing how these documents may be preserved so they will not be lost to either disasters or environmental factors. It is extremely important that these records be preserved. While there are certain financial records that can be destroyed after a certain period of time, some records should never be destroyed. Before anyone throws a box of records away, he should make sure he knows what is in it. In some cases, he should get the approval of the state overseer before discarding a box of records.

The minutes of the meetings of the Church and Pastor's Council is an example of the kind of records that need to be kept because they establish why decisions were made. These records are important when a church seeks to secure a bank loan. The bank will probably require the church to produce a record of the church conference where it approved the securing of a loan to build a new building or whatever the loan covers. They are also important in matters of employment. In order for pastoral staff members to take part of their salary as a housing allotment, their right to do so has to be recorded in the minutes of the Church and Pastor's Council at the beginning of the year. This is a requirement of the Internal Revenue Service. There is no intent to give legal advice here. If the church is faced with a legal question or a legal issue, it should consult with the state overseer or contact an attorney.

Keeping a record of the church's activities through bulletins, videotapes, or audiotapes is important. All of these things reveal what happened at the church at a certain time and are valuable for an accurate history of the church.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL CHURCH TRUSTEES

How property is held in the Church of God is addressed in the *General Assembly Minutes* and needs to be considered. The International General Assembly is the Church's highest governing body and is made up of all the members of the Church of God, male and female. The decision of the Assembly is that property is to be in the name of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee. That is done for a reason. Since the Church is not congregational in government, but centralized, what one owns, all owns, and what one owes, all owes. A banker is impressed when a local church

seeks a loan and he sees that the entire denomination is behind that congregation. This is one of the benefits of being part of a larger body, a centralized body. The role of the local trustees is affected by a centralized form of government. They have the authority to convey property, to sell property, to act as the official body. But they do not personally sign for the property, because the property is held and deeded to the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee. Otherwise, the local trustees would be personally responsible for a loan, and if there was a problem, a lien could be placed against their personal property. But in the Church of God, the trustees only hold the property in trust for the local church. They are more or less the official stamp who should sign documents only when they know that that is the official will of the local church and that it is being done on behalf of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee.

SUMMARY

In summary, there are both qualifications and a selection process to be followed in the local church. The pastor should always adhere to the *General Assembly Minutes* in these matters because they are placed in the *Minutes* for specific reasons; for example, a legal challenge. It is also valuable to validate the structures of the Church and its centralized form of government. These provisions are a means to an end. They are there to help the local church function and do what it is supposed to do. By paying attention to some of these small details, the local church can be unleashed to do the ministry that God has called it to do by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. A pastor should understand that taking care of these necessary items is important because they free him and enable him to do better what God has called him to do.

The Local Church and Its Ministry Structure

The heartbeat of the Church of God is not in Cleveland, Tennessee, or in the national offices of the countries where the Church operates, or in the state offices of the states where the churches are located: the heartbeat of the Church of God is in the local church.

The local church is the focus of ministry. It is in the context of the local church that people come to Christ, receive spiritual experiences and grow in the Lord. It is in the local church that converts are disciplined and believers are equipped for their Christian work. It is from the base of the local church that the ministries of outreach, care, and evangelism are operated.

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Although the word *church* appears some 105 times in the New Testament, about 90 of those times it is used in reference to the *local* church.

It is both a divine and human institution. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church." It is *His* church; He is the one who calls its members to Himself. But Paul, in the context of writing about the growth of the church, declares in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "We are laborers together with God." It is divine: It is Christ's church. It is human: Believers have a part in building it.

The New Testament, while it does not go into a great deal of detail about the government of the church, mentions its functioning enough to underscore its importance. Jesus set the church in motion. It is through the church that He works to expand the Kingdom. The church is, in fact, the only institution He initiated. He plans for the Kingdom to be extended as a result of the efforts of the church. He has no "Plan B." He intends for the church to function under the leadership of gifted individuals, with all men and women who are part of it involved in its ministries.

According to Ephesians 4:11, God sends these gifted leaders to the church as "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers," for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. A pastor's primary task is to get people ready to perform works of service in the name of Christ.

"Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry" is the way the *New International Version* renders the phrase. "Perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry" is the King James Version expression (see Ephesians 4:12).

The word *perfecting* or *equipping* is instructive. It is used several times in the New Testament and often in Greek documents from the first century. It is the same word that appears in Mark 1 when Jesus sees His future disciples at work by the seaside. According to Mark, they are *mending* their nets. It is the same familiar Greek word rendered *perfecting* or *equipping*. It is used in other contexts to describe the work of a doctor in setting a broken bone so that it heals correctly.

What is the sense of this task that is committed to church leaders? What does it mean to *perfect* or *equip* the saints? It means, simply doing whatever is necessary to help them be able to perform the function they are designed to perform.

The ministries conducted by a local church ought to be predicated on the purposes the church wishes to accomplish. For most local congregations, there is a desire to do at least four things: worship, discipleship, soulwinning, and care.

SUMMARY

Having reached this point, readers should know a great deal more about the Church of God. This section will be a summary of what has been covered.

The repeated emphasis in ministry is everything begins and ends with the local church. General structures, state structures, and district structures are indispensable because the Church must have that kind of coordinated leadership. But when it comes right down to it, ministry is performed in the context of the local church. That is where the people are and that is where pastors give leadership. The focus must always be on the local church. No matter how good a program may work on paper, no matter how carefully it may be structured and thought out, unless it has functionality, unless it works on the level of the local church, then there's not really much reason to pursue it.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Church must never lose sight of its mission. Whatever is done at any level in the Church means absolutely nothing unless two things are happening: first, people are being won to Jesus Christ; and second, they are being discipled. That is what being a part of the body of Christ and the Church is all about. Transformation takes place at the local level. If ministry is not taking place there, what is happening elsewhere is of little consequence.

The term *mission* is being used here in the sense of the Church's business, its purpose. Many secular organizations have mission statements. They express their mission statement in a sentence or two so that anybody anywhere can look at that sentence and know what their organizations are all about. The mission statement of the Church was formulated in simple terms by Jesus Himself. This is what He said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19, 20, *NKJV*).

Jesus clearly defined His own mission when He said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18, 19, *NKJV*).

Think about the dynamics of that moment when Jesus walked into the synagogue in Nazareth where He grew up and where they recognized Him as Joseph's son. They must have looked at each other and said, "Is this not Joseph's son and yet He's talking like God?" When He rolled the scroll up, handed it back to the minister, and proceeded to be seated, He said: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21, *NKJV*). This is one of the most dramatic moments in the life of Christ.

Jesus confessed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. How do believers know if the Spirit of the Lord is upon them? Is it because they feel good, or because they are able to shout and have a great time? No! It is because they are ministering to people, and because they are meeting the needs of people. This is what a Pentecostal church is all about. God sent the Holy Spirit for no other reason than to help believers minister to people. The Holy Spirit was sent for mission; the church exists for mission; God has called believers for mission. That mission is, very simply, reaching those who are lost, discipling them, and bringing them to full maturity in Christ.

As Pentecostal people who believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is easy to identify with both statements of mission from our Lord. Pentecostals are people of mission, of purpose. They are busy doing ministry by proclaiming the good news of the gospel, emphasizing divine healing, and declaring that deliverance is available.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The importance of the local church cannot be overstated. Does this eliminate the need for World Missions, or general headquarters, or state headquarters, or district organizations? Why can't the local church come together, have its services, keep its funds, and just do its own thing? For one thing, the local church cannot accomplish the Great Commission alone. God has called and chosen the Church for such a time as this. The local church cannot do what is being done in Uganda, or Korea, and so forth. But through World Missions and the general organization of the Church, the local church can join hands with others to take the gospel around the world.

In this connection, the history and heritage of the Church is interesting to view. The Church is not perfect because it is made up of human beings and human beings make mistakes. But the beauty of the Church's history is that it has overcome its mistakes and stood firm through crises. Those in leadership have always found a way to overcome adversity and remain relevant in a variety of situations. The local church cannot do this alone, not on an international scale.

Also, throughout its history, the Church has always tried to meet immediate needs, and to use available technology. One of the things the Church did in its earliest history was to produce the *Church of God Evangel*, and later the *Lighted Pathway*, using the technology of the day. Other uses of technology include the *Forward in Faith* radio broadcast and the use of the Internet. These are things that a local church cannot do on this scale on its own. Hence the need to be part of a larger body of believers.

Another thing that needs to be pointed out is that none of the structures of the Church are on the same level as its doctrine. The Church's doctrine is set in stone inasmuch as it is established by the Word of God, but the various structures of the Church may need to change to minister effectively and to adapt to different cultures. A wise teacher has said, "The Church's message must never change, but its methods must always change." If the Church is going to be faithful to its heritage, it has to be able to adapt to the larger, global setting that can only be done as a corporate body. A local congregation cannot do it alone.

THE CHURCH IS A MISSIONARY CHURCH

From its earliest days and throughout its history, the Church of God has been a missionary church, a sending church. God is a sending God: He sent Abraham; He sent Joseph; He sent Jesus; and Jesus sends believers today. The Church has always taken that very seriously. But this missionary vision could never be realized by a local church alone. On the other hand, it can be accomplished when the Church works together collectively. The Church of God has always been, continues to be, and will continue to be a missionary church.

Another thing to think about is that the Church of God now has more than 119 colleges, universities, and Bible schools around the world. The Church has taken the mandate seriously about making disciples and then training people so they can disciple others. To a large extent, that has been the method that missionary work has employed. This is not something that could have been done by a local congregation alone.

World Missions in the Church of God is different from most any other organization. Whether one is in Africa or South America or Eastern Europe or wherever, one finds a feeling of family togetherness and a sense of being connected with the Church of God in the United States.

Not only has the Church of God in the United States been a sending agency, but now some of its people from other countries are going as missionaries to different parts of the world. These sending countries include the European countries, Central and South American countries, Korea, and Mexico. Even more interesting is the fact that a few nations are sending missionaries to the United States of America. This is easy to understand, for example, when you realize that outside of San Juan, Puerto Rico, New York City has the second largest Puerto Rican population in the world.

The Church must keep reminding itself that it is responding to the mission Jesus sent it to fulfill. He prayed for believers who make up the body of Christ to be one like He and the Father are one. He further says, "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). That is a strong mandate, and to disobey that is nothing short of high treason.

This mandate has been in the minds of Church of God members from its earliest days. The first members did not stay in the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. They came to the city of Cleveland, Tennessee, and then to regions beyond. These moves were followed by a worldwide outreach sparked by people like J.H. Ingram, R.M. Evans, Herman Lauster, and others. They went forth with a burden to reach the unsaved masses beyond the borders of the United States. Also, their purpose was to train ministers for competent ministry that they might go forth and spread the gospel.

TWO IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINES

Two theological issues have been driving forces for the Church of God through the years. One is this idea that Jesus has sent the Church forth even as the Father sent Him. There has been a feeling that the Church does not have a choice. It must keep moving and reaching for the Lord. The second theological issue is embedded in the eschatological doctrines. Believing that Jesus

is coming soon gives the Church a sense of urgency. It must be about the Master's business. The Church must not lose the drive derived from its eschatological dogma. It must never forget that Jesus did establish the church, His body, and the Church of God is part of that. But this world is not a permanent dwelling place. The Church's mission is a short-term venture because Jesus is coming back.

At the dawn of a new millennium, the Church faces the same eschatological concerns that have always confronted believers. It still wrestles with the question of when Christ will return, and it has the same kinds of opportunity that it started out with. So the Church has every reason to have the same drive that has characterized it for more than 100 years. It should continue to seek God's presence and His enablement to accomplish the mission He has given the Church.

THE CHURCH FACES NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Today, the Church has new technologies and new opportunities to perform ministry. It does not have the Bible Training School (BTS) anymore; it has Lee University; it has the Pentecostal Theological Seminary; it has other schools and training institutes around the globe. It seems that the Church is sitting on the threshold of what God desires it to be. If that is true, its best years are ahead. What a tragedy it would be if it missed this opportunity. The Church must always remember that when the day of evaluation comes, it will not be the general overseer, or the state overseer, or the pastor making the final decision. It will be Jesus Himself. The business of the Church is to conduct itself in such fashion as to hear Him say, "Well done."

An encouraging sign for the Church is that young men and women who are participating in various avenues of training have the same kind of calling and the same sense of urgency that have driven the great men and women of the Church through the years. It is an exciting time to be part of the Church.

In conclusion, it is important for believers to know that God has called them and that He has a framework in which they are to minister. For many of them, that framework is the Church of God. If that is the framework in which they are going to work, it is important for them to know what it means to be part of the Church of God. They should always remember that it is God who has called them and given them a sense of urgency. The responsibility of the Church is to give them a platform, to open doors of opportunity for them, and to help them be prepared for ministry, but ultimately, they are not going to be judged by how they pleased those over them in the Church of God. They have to answer to God. The encouraging thing is that many of the young ministers today understand that. They have expressed a willingness to give their lives for God and for the call of God on their lives, and for the Church and for what the Church stands for. They understand that what cannot be done alone, can be done when the Church as a part of the body of Christ works together. There is, therefore, reason indeed to believe that the best days of the Church are ahead.