

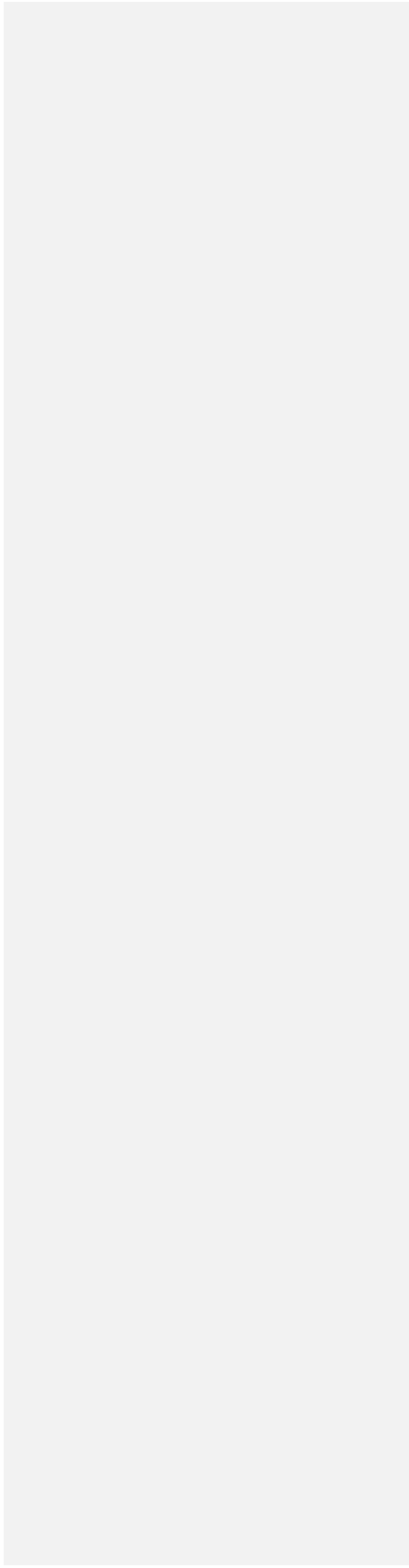
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WE BELIEVE
(Draft as of April 27, 2010)
April 2010
(with May editorial revisions)

The Doctrinal Statement of the Churches of God, General Conference

DRAFT

Adopted by the General Conference in Session Findlay, Ohio
June 1983, 1986
Churches of God Publications Findlay, Ohio



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Comment [L1]: This will need to be revised

Comment [L2]: add new information if any new translations have been added this time

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INTRODUCTION

John Winebrenner put forward the first concise statement of faith for the Churches of God, General Conference in 1844. As he noted then, the Church of God has no other authority than the sixty-six books of the Bible which is her only and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. As such the Church of God affirms no other creed or discipline as binding and holds the Bible as its supreme authority. That being said, Winebrenner believed that there was benefit in presenting the Church's "avowed principles" constituting of a "short... declaration, showing her views, as to what may be called leading matters of faith, experience and practice" for the public good. Again in 1863, as an outline for instruction in the blessings of the Christian faith, Christian H. Forney pointed out the value of "a handbook for the ministerial novitiate, the layman, the Sabbath School teacher, and all those who love the doctrines of the Church."

At the centennial celebration in 1925, the General Eldership approved a summary statement of faith based on Winebrenner's 1844 declaration but focused strictly on doctrinal matters. Fifty years later in 1975, the General Conference approved a condensed version of the 1925 statement (see page 7). Although these various declarations provide a succinct statement of belief for the Churches of God, General Conference, there still remains the need for a handbook to help those seeking more information. To this end the General Conference provided its churches and pastors with a brief view of *The Distinctive Doctrines of the Churches of God in North America*. Commonly known among the churches as "the yellow book," it served the Church for nearly three decades. Then in 1959 the General Eldership approved a new exposition in the *Teachings and Practices of the Churches of God*. That Bible-based booklet (called "the green book") set forth in order things most surely believed among us. It was never seen as a creed. For the Churches of God the Bible is the only true standard for Christian faith and practice.

Each generation needs to come to grips anew with the faith once delivered to the saints. So it was that in 1983 the General Conference produced the *We Believe* book as a statement of common faith across the Churches of God. "The blue book," as revised in 1986, has served the Church well, but the time has come for the contemporary church to reaffirm its doctrinal understanding of God's Word. Trusting the Holy Spirit to guide in the interpretation and application of the Bible, the General Conference undertook this revision of its statement of beliefs. This is not a new statement but a refinement of *We Believe—The Doctrinal Statement of the Churches of God, General Conference*. It is the product of many persons. It received the invaluable attention of several general consultations and a review process that included input from across the CGGC. Many faithful students of the Word drawn from all areas of the Churches of God wrote, edited, evaluated and revised the various sections.

The Churches of God, General Conference does not endorse any particular translation of the Scriptures. The statement on translations which concludes the section on "The Bible" expresses the sense of the Church. The committee of writers contributing to this document used translations, not paraphrases, that best clarify and elucidate. These translations are identified by the following key:

- KJV = King James Version
- NASB = New American Standard Version
- NIV = New International Version
- RSV = Revised Standard Version
- TEV = Today's English Version

(The list will be updated to reflect this new edition once all articles are completed.)

The same guidelines that governed the writing of *We Believe* in 1983 guided the writing of this new edition:

- to be a statement of faith apart from practice
- to present a positive expression of our faith
- to be concise
- to be a document for laypersons, non-technical, minimizing theological jargon and preaching
- to use examples and sources only from Scripture.

The Administrative Council extends deep appreciation to representatives from local conferences, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, the CGGC Executive Director and Regional Directors as well as the Associates in Ministry, writers of various sections and drafts, those who contributed editorial skills and

164 many who shared input to prepare this document. Their attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and
165 their love for God's Church are evident in these pages. We particularly thank these persons:

166
167 (List the names of those contributing to the document to be added.)
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DRAFT

The CGGC Statement of Faith

Summarized in 1975 from the Statements of 1925 and 1844

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We believe in one supreme God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
co-equal and co-eternal: and in
the miraculous conception,
the virgin birth,
the vicarious sacrifice,
the bodily resurrection,
the triumphant ascension, and
the second coming of our Lord.

We believe in the gift and work of the Holy Spirit;
the divinely inspired Word of God as our only and all-sufficient rule
of faith and practice;
and in the free moral agency of man.

We believe God created man;
man has fallen;
and his only possible redemption is through the atonement of Christ.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins;
rebirth by the Word and Spirit
and justification by faith.

We believe baptism, feetwashing, and the Lord's supper
to be ordinances of the church.

We believe in the holiness of the Lord's Day;
and God's appointment of civil governments.

We believe in the resurrection of the dead;
the final judgment;
and life everlasting.

GOD

We believe in God.

God is eternal. God is the beginning of all that is. *"In the beginning God..."* (Gen. 1:1 NIV).

God is living and the only source of life and existence. To Moses, when asked what to call him, God replied, *"I AM, that I AM"* (Ex. 3:14 KJV), indicating God's existence is beyond our reality, but also that all reality exists and has been created by him. God is sovereign—meaning he has complete authority over all creation.

"God is spirit; and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24 NIV). God is not a physical being. He is not human and is neither male nor female. We address God using terms he himself revealed (e.g. Father, Son, Spirit, rock, shield, Lord, arm of the Lord, hand of God, etc.). Pictures familiar to our experience are often used in Scripture in order to help us understand God, but it is impossible for us to have an exhaustive description of God. Since God revealed his character and nature to us, we use the masculine pronouns he chose to address himself (e.g. Gen 3:11; John 1:1-2, 15:1-2, 16:5-11) as we describe what we believe.

God is unchanging (Mal. 3:6-7). What God has promised, what he has set as standards for life and goodness, are not open to being rewritten or changed (Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17). This is not only a further reflection of God's own identity as "I AM"—transcendent of our reality—but also a benefit to us that God is not impulsive or variable with his judgments (Rom. 2:1-13).

We believe God is three persons but one God.

This is also known as the doctrine of Trinity, or the Tri-unity of God.

Deuteronomy 6:4 says, *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one"* (NIV). This passage indicates that God is singularly God—totally undivided. The Hebrew word for "one" can also be translated "alone" and in context of both Old and New Testaments uses of this verse, it carries the meaning that God alone is God and the only one to whom his people should listen. But it also means that he exists in completeness and unity within himself.

We believe that God has revealed himself as three persons, complete identities and personalities, but wholly submitted one to another and indivisibly unified. Those three persons are:

Father—creator/founder, (Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 68:5; Isa.9:6) by whom all creation was conceived and finds its purpose.

1. God the Father is the superintendent over all creation. *"He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Matt. 5:45 NIV; also Matt. 6:26, 10:29; 1 Cor. 8:6).
2. God the Father is the ultimate forgiver and is merciful. *"If you forgive men...your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive...your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matt. 6:14-15 NIV; also Luke 6:36, 23:34).
3. God the Father is the divine initiator in our relationship with Christ. *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:44 NIV; also John 6:65, 8:28, 42, 14:16, 26; Col. 1:12).
4. God the Father is the ultimate giver of all that is good and perfect. *"Every good and perfect gift is from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (James 1:17 NIV; also Eph. 1:3, 5:20).

Son (Jesus)—is the Word. Creation was formed by the Word the Father spoke. The Son (Word) brings the Father's plans into material creation (Gen. 1:3; Isa. 9:6; John 1:1-3, 10:30; Heb. 1:1-3). Through him all things came to be, and by him the plans of God are fulfilled. Those plans include humanity's redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection, and the revealing of the fullness of God's wisdom through the Church to the authorities of this world and the spiritual realms (Rom. 3:22-26; Eph. 3:10-11).

That Jesus is one with the Father is clearly stated in several places in the New Testament (Titus 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:12). When Thomas encountered Jesus after the resurrection, he declared *"My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28 NIV). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2) and the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19) present with us. Peter used the terms *Holy Spirit* and *God* interchangeably in Acts when he said to Ananias, *"...why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied to men but to God"* (Acts 5:3-4 RSV).

Holy Spirit—is the mysterious presence of God, often called "the Holy Ghost" or the "Spirit of God." The Creation account gives our impression of what the Spirit does in describing the Spirit "brooding/hovering" (Gen. 1:2)—which paints a picture of the Spirit like a bird assembling a nest or like a "wind" moving in and through, assembling/empowering the bits and pieces of creation.

263 This role is depicted throughout Scripture as we see the Spirit interweaving the will/purpose of
264 God and revealing who Jesus Christ is (Gen 1:1-2; John 14:26, 16:7-13; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:5; 1
265 Cor. 12). He is also the Spirit of Christ because of the co-equal nature of the persons of the
266 Trinity. Through the Spirit creation was ordered, and it is by him we receive God's comfort,
267 counsel, power, special gifting to build up the Church, and are led into all truth.

268 In Matthew 3:16-17 we see all three persons of God together at Jesus' baptism, which was done to
269 fulfill righteousness—aligning the work God was going to do through Jesus to the same pattern God set
270 for the rest of humanity.

271 There is only one God. Paul reminds us, "...there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called
272 gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there
273 is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord,
274 Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:4b-6 NIV). God is one
275 (Deut. 6:4). The Father is God. Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit is God (Eph. 4:3-6).

276 **We believe God is both unknowable and knowable.**

277 God is hidden and revealed, far (transcendent) and near (immanent). As stated before, God reveals
278 himself, and has chosen to do so in direct relationship to people, and through his character displayed in
279 Creation (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:20). God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. God is greater than our
280 minds can comprehend. We are to honor, respect, and praise God. God is love (1 John 1:1-3). He cares
281 in a personal way about each person. This concept of God is known as Theism. It is a specific concept in
282 contrast to Deism, which holds that God is transcendent but not immanent—setting creation in motion but
283 having no further interaction. The call of Abraham, the exodus of Israel, the ministry of Jesus Christ and
284 the work of the Holy Spirit all demonstrate this. Theism is expressed in passages like 2 Peter 1:3-4;
285 Genesis 12-15; Exodus; Matthew 3:16-17; Acts 2; and 2 Peter 1:3-4.

286 **We believe God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.**

287 God is omniscient (all-knowing). God has infinite knowledge. God is the source of all truth. "Great is our
288 Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5 KJV; also Isa. 40:26; Heb. 4:13).

289 God is omnipotent (all powerful). "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26 KJV; also Ps. 107; Isa.
290 26:4; Rev. 19:6).

291 God is omnipresent (all present). God's presence is infinite—everywhere, always. As the psalmist
292 declares, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the
293 heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if
294 I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast. If I
295 say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not
296 be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you" (Ps. 139:7-12 NIV).

297 **We believe in the holiness of God.**

298 To be holy means to be separated from and opposed to evil. "For I am the Lord your God; consecrate
299 yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44 RSV). Moreover, to be holy means to be
300 committed to purity and wholeness. "But just as he who calls you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is
301 written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16 NIV; also James 1:13).

302 It is God's holiness that provides our deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. In this act of
303 deliverance, God's holiness—separation from and opposition to evil—is expressed in love. Through the
304 sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in atonement for our sin, wholeness is possible for all. God is holy,
305 therefore committed to wholeness.

306 **We believe the work of God is primarily creation, grace, justice, mercy.**

307 God's work is creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Gen. 1:1 NIV). The
308 full Godhead was involved. "In the beginning was the Word (Jesus Christ)...All things were made through
309 him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1, 3 RSV; also Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16).
310 The Holy Spirit was involved. "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of
311 the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2 KJV).

312 All things were created by God. God is the source and sustainer of all life. The original work of creation
313 has been finished, but God continues to supplement that creation throughout history. This includes the re-
314 creating of human beings fallen into sin. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed
315 away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17 RSV). Therefore, salvation is part of the creative work of
316 God.

321 God's work is grace. Grace is defined as *unmerited, undeserved favor*, given simply because of God's
322 generosity and goodwill toward us. Grace is the reflection of God's mercy, extended to all who will receive
323 it. An individual's response influences the giving of grace but does not determine it (John 1:14; Rom.
324 3:23-26).

325 God's work is justice. Justice sets things straight and lines them up with God's will. It includes fair
326 judgment and the enforcement of judgment's verdict. *"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the*
327 *oppressed"* (Ps. 103:6 NIV). God does not cause evil, but has allowed humanity the choice for
328 relationship with him, or not. God continues to allow freewill, even after the fall of humanity (which
329 affected all Creation), but constantly works the brokenness of Creation and human choice toward the
330 good of his plan in Christ—which includes Creation and those who have chosen to follow Christ (Rom. 8).
331 So we do not presume God will protect believers from suffering, or make them wealthy or healthy simply
332 for following Christ, but he will turn all things (good and evil) toward his good plans.

333 God's work is mercy. Mercy is the satisfaction of justice through the forgiveness of sin when guilty
334 sinners acknowledge their sin, are sorry for it, and turn from it. *"Mercy triumphs over judgment!"* (James
335 2:13 NIV).

336
337 **We believe God wants us to know him and has revealed himself in various ways.**

338 God is revealed through creation. God is distinctly other than creation and transcends it, but the
339 orderliness and majesty of creation declares God's existence, creativity, and glory (Isa. 6:3).

340 God is revealed through history, especially Israel's history. The giving of the Law, the calling of leaders
341 and prophets, the deliverance of Israel from various captivities, and the specific writings through those
342 called by God to share his will all reveal God's persistent involvement in human history and intention to be
343 in relationship with people.

344 God is revealed most clearly through Jesus Christ. *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times*
345 *and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. He*
346 *is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things*
347 *at the end. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being,*
348 *sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, he sat*
349 *down in heaven at the right side of God, the Supreme Power"* (Heb. 1:1-3 TEV). Jesus told Philip,
350 *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9 NIV). Jesus came to acquaint us more fully
351 with God. To know God we must know Jesus Christ—his life, teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection.
352 From Jesus we have learned that God is a just but compassionate Father.

353 God is revealed through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who verifies the manifestation of God
354 presented by Jesus (John 16:13-15). It is the Holy Spirit who comes to live in relationship with the
355 conscience and physical life of those who follow Christ—as counselor, comforter, empowerer, teacher,
356 guide, revealer of all truth (Zech. 7:12; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). It is by this fellowship with the Spirit that
357 we gain insight into God's will, intentions, character and nature--*"However, as it is written: 'No eye has*
358 *seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'—but*
359 *God has revealed it to us by his Spirit...The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come*
360 *from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are*
361 *spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:9-16 NIV).

362 God is revealed through the Church. *"His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom*
363 *of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to His*
364 *purpose which He accomplished through Christ Jesus our lord. In Him and through faith in Him we may*
365 *approach God with freedom and confidence"* (Eph. 3:10-12). The Church is meant to reflect and
366 demonstrate God's character and nature.

367 God is revealed through the Bible. Paul writes to Timothy, *"...and how from infancy you have known the*
368 *holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture*
369 *is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."* (2 Tim.
370 3:15-16 NIV) (see Bible section pp. 15-16 for more).

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372

Comment [L4]: Translation?

JESUS CHRIST

We believe Jesus has been active since before the creation of the world.

As the second person of the Trinity, Jesus has always existed, enjoying the love of the Father from “before the creation of the world” (John 17). *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1 NIV). Along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus took an active role in the making of our world. *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him* (Col. 1:16 NIV).

Comment [L5]: Translation?

We believe Jesus is the culmination of God’s redemptive promise in the Scriptures.

Much of Scripture testifies that all of creation looks forward to God’s ultimate act of restoration in Jesus. *Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth...But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy....The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox* (Isa. 65:17-18, 25 NIV).

Jesus, as the promised Messiah anticipated in the Old Testament, is himself the personal fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, of its foretelling as well as its righteousness. *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them* (Matt. 5:17 NIV). The Old and New Testaments together form a reliable and comprehensive witness to the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ. *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself* (Luke 24:27 NIV).

We believe Jesus is God having taken on human flesh, and thus is fully human.

At a particular point in time, the Creator entered our world by being born a human baby who would redeem his creation. *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us* (John 1:14 NIV). Not merely appearing to be human, or simply clothing himself with humanity, he truly became fully a human being in the flesh.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and so was called Emmanuel, *God with us* (Matt. 1:23). *What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins* (Matt. 1: 20-21 NIV).

God became human in order to make himself knowable to us, to offer himself as an acceptable sacrifice on our behalf, and as man to represent us before the Father. *For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people* (Heb.2:17 NIV).

Comment [L6]: Translation?

We believe Jesus is one with the Father, and is thus fully divine.

Though he became human, as the second person of the Trinity, he continued to be divine. *I and the Father are one* (John 10:30 NIV). Jesus is God himself, not a hybrid, or special agent, sent merely to accomplish a task. Jesus is of the same essence, of the same substance as the Father. *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father...Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work* (John 14: 9-10 NIV).

The Son makes known, or unveils, the Father, enabling us to rightly and truly know and encounter God as he truly is. *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known* (John 1:18 NIV).

We believe Jesus became like us so that we might become like him in his perfect humanity.

As our Savior and high priest, Jesus assumed our broken humanity in order to heal it within himself and to offer it to the Father. *Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess* (Heb. 3:1 NIV). In his human flesh he lived a perfect life of obedience, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin* (Heb 4:15 NIV).

We believe Jesus died on a cross to take away the sin of the world.

God’s gracious atonement, originating in his loving heart, and gradually unfolding throughout the Old Testament, climaxed in Jesus’ death on the cross. In trusting obedience to the Father, he willingly laid down his life in our place, dying the death we deserved. In doing so, Jesus took away our sin and broke death’s hold on us forevermore. *Now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to*

431 present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith,
432 established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (Col. 1:22-23 NIV).

433 In taking our place on the cross, he established a new and everlasting covenant between God and
434 humankind. “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the
435 righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV). He now enables us to share in his intimate relationship with the
436 Father. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love” (John 15:9 NIV).

437

438 **We believe Jesus was raised victoriously from the dead.**

439 The Father raised Jesus from the dead, a well-witnessed fact which verified his identity. “God has
440 raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:32 NIV). When Jesus rose from the
441 dead, He broke forevermore the power of death, and removed the permanence of its sting. “I am the
442 resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and
443 believes in me will never die” (John 11: 25-26 NIV).

444 Jesus now provides a certain hope that we who trust in Him will also one day be raised bodily like he
445 was to new and everlasting life. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead
446 comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own
447 turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him” (1 Cor. 15:21-23 NIV).

448

449 **We believe Jesus ascended to the Father in his human body.**

450 Jesus ascended to the Father so that the Holy Spirit would be sent into the world. “I tell you the truth: It
451 is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I
452 will send Him to you” (John 16:7 NIV).

453 Now the ascended Jesus, in his resurrected human body, represents us to the Father. “Therefore He is
454 able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for
455 them” (Heb. 7:25 NIV). Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, continues to be present and active in the ministry of
456 his body, the Church.

457

458 **We believe Jesus is Lord and Savior.**

459 Jesus, having triumphed over sin and death, is now exalted as Lord of all. “Salvation is found in no one
460 else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 NIV).
461 As the one mediator between God and man, God’s one and only Son, he alone has access to the Father,
462 and no one can come to the Father except by him. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes
463 to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV).

464 Jesus continues his ongoing ministry until the end of the age, when he will return to judge the living and
465 the dead. “He commanded us to preach to the people and testify that He is the one whom God appointed
466 as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him
467 receives forgiveness of sins through His name” (Acts 10:42-43 NIV).

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470

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is God.

As a person in the Godhead, the Spirit is co-eternal, co-equal, co-powerful, and co-operative with the Father and the Son (Gen. 1:2; Acts 5:3-4). Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19 NIV).

The Holy Spirit is a person who teaches (John 14:26), commissions (Acts 13:2-4), directs (Acts 16:6-7), intercedes (Rom. 8:26-27), and feels (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30).

We believe that the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Covenant.

The Spirit of God was active at Creation, moving upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2) and creating human beings (Job 33:4). After the Fall, the same Spirit of God enabled Bezaleel to build the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3), and equipped special people to be prophets (Ezek. 37:1), judges (Judg. 3:10), or kings (2 Sam. 23:2). God promised the Israelites that "I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring" (Isa. 44:3 NIV).

The Holy Spirit was also instrumental in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35). The Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22) and led him into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan (Luke 4:1). In the power of that same Spirit (Luke 4:14), the Savior commenced and completed his ministry of reconciliation, casting out demons by the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28) and promising to send the Counselor, the Spirit of truth (John 15:26).

We believe the Holy Spirit revealed himself in a new way on the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), the Church was born. A new era of the Holy Spirit was ushered in—the New Covenant in which persons are placed by the Holy Spirit through the new birth into the family of God, the Body of Christ, the Church. Appearing as "a rushing mighty wind" and "tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:2-3 KJV), the Holy Spirit embarked upon a new ministry of sanctification. Peter interpreted this event as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) and of the promise given by his Master (Acts 2:33).

We believe the Holy Spirit can be known and experienced.

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39 NIV).

At the time Christ is received, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to give spiritual rebirth (John 3:3-6); the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5-6); the indwelling (infilling) of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39); entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:3); and immersion into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). This is what John the Baptist meant when he said that Jesus "...will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33 NIV; also John 1:29-34).

This baptism of the Spirit is experienced by every Christian. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13 NIV).

To bring persons to accept this relationship with God through Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts persons of their sin (John 16:9), of Christ's righteousness (John 16:10), and of judgment on evil (John 16:11). "When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (John 16:8-11 NIV).

We believe the Holy Spirit endows the followers of Christ with the unity of the Spirit.

The unity of the Spirit is a special communion that exists in the fellowship of persons who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Eph. 4:3). In that relationship God's love flows from believer to believer to mold the followers of Christ into a functioning body of love as the family of God, the Church (Eph. 4:15-16; 1 John 4:13-21).

We believe the Holy Spirit enables believers to grow spiritually.

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of individual members of God's family, giving guidance, instruction, and power for the Christian lifestyle. Jesus said, "...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV).

Comment [L7]: Which word do you want?

530 The Holy Spirit reveals and brings glory to Christ. *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide*
531 *you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you*
532 *what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All*
533 *that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it*
534 *known to you”* (John 16:13-15 NIV).
535

536 **We believe the infilling of the Holy Spirit is not a one-time event in our lives, but rather is in the**
537 **present active tense and is meant to be present and active in the lives of believers.**

- 538 • *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18
539 NIV).
- 540 • *“And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my*
541 *laws”* (Ezek. 36:27 NIV).
- 542 • *“...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him.*
543 *But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you”* (John 14:17 NIV).
- 544 • *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in*
545 *you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”* (Rom. 8:9
546 NIV).
- 547 • *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”* (1 Cor.
548 3:16 NIV).
- 549 • *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have*
550 *received from God? You are not your own.”* (1 Cor. 6:19 NIV).
- 551 • *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18
552 NIV).
- 553 • *“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who*
554 *lives in us”* (2 Tim. 1:14 NIV).
- 555 • *“As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to*
556 *teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not*
557 *counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in Him”* (1 John 2:27 NIV).
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559 **We believe the Holy Spirit dispenses spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church.**

560 The Holy Spirit works in the collective Body of Christ, the Church. According to his wisdom and will, the
561 Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts among Christians for the building up of the Church (Rom. 12:6-8; 1
562 Cor. 12:7-11, 25-31; Eph. 4:11-13). *“The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the*
563 *good of all...It is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as He wishes, He gives different gifts to each*
564 *person.”*
565

566 **Rom. 12:6-8 (NIV)**

- 567 • *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.*
- 568 • *If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*
- 569 • *If it is serving, let him serve;*
- 570 • *if it is teaching, let him teach;*
- 571 • *if it is encouraging, let him encourage;*
- 572 • *if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously;*
- 573 • *if it is leadership, let him govern diligently;*
- 574 • *if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*
575

576 *“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received*
577 *to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it*
578 *as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides,*
579 *so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 4:9-11 NIV).
580

581 **1 Cor. 12:7-11 (NIV)**

- 582 • *“To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom,*
- 583 • *to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,*
- 584 • *to another faith by the same Spirit,*
- 585 • *to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,*
- 586 • *to another miraculous powers,*
- 587 • *to another prophecy,*

Comment [L8]: Reference?

Comment [L9]: Do all of these verses listing the gifts need to be bulleted? Why not just quote them in a paragraph like other Scriptures have been?

- 588 • to another distinguishing between spirits,
589 • to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,
590 • and to still another the interpretation of tongues.”

591
592 1 Cor. 12:27-31 (NIV)

- 593 • “Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
594 • And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles,
595 • second prophets,
596 • third teachers,
597 • then workers of miracles,
598 • also those having gifts of healing,
599 • those able to help others,
600 • those with gifts of administration,
601 • and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.
602 • Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of
603 healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?
604 • But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

605
606 Eph. 4:11-13 (NIV)

- 607 • “It was He who gave some to be apostles,
608 • some to be prophets,
609 • some to be evangelists,
610 • and some to be pastors and teachers,
611 • to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up
612 • until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,
613 • attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

614
615 The Spirit knows what gifts are needed and which persons should receive them. These gifts come as
616 the Holy Spirit chooses, for the good of the Church. “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit,
617 and He gives them to each one, just as He determines” (1 Cor. 12:11 NIV).

618 For this reason, the Churches of God encourages its members to exercise faith and submission in
619 discovering the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit bestows on each one. We trust the Holy Spirit to know what
620 the Church needs and which members should be used to supply those needs. “Therefore, my brothers,
621 be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39 NIV). One Christian’s gifts
622 should not be considered higher or lower than another’s. “God has arranged the parts in the body, every
623 one of them, just as he wanted them to be...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its
624 parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:18, 25 NIV). “There are different kinds of
625 working, but the same God works all of them in all men” (1 Cor. 12:6 NIV). As Christians discover and
626 exercise their spiritual gifts, “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,
627 grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16 NIV). Thus, the God of all the
628 ages accomplishes his will in history and brings abundant life to his people, “not by might, nor by power,
629 but by my spirit” (Zech. 4:6 KJV).

630
631 **We believe the fruit of the Spirit is the essential evidence of a believer’s continual infilling with the**
632 **Holy Spirit and takes preeminence over the gifts** (1 Cor. 13: 1-13).

633 At work in Christ’s followers, the Holy Spirit’s power produces life-building fruit that makes them
634 effective witnesses before the watching world. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on
635 you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the
636 earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV). “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
637 faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23 NIV). This fruit is the essential evidence of the
638 presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer (Matt. 7:16). It is the process of sanctification.

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THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible authority, the Word of God, our only rule for following Jesus in every aspect of our life.

Paul states, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NIV). When Paul says that by the scriptures the Christian, "may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work," it is clear that we need no other authority or creed than the Bible, that it is the final and all-sufficient declaration in belief, morals and activity for the Church and the Christian. We do not object to publishing, for information, what we believe and practice or to studying historic creeds for personal interest but we do not create any such statement or receive any historic creed as an authority or test of fellowship. Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the conscience and his Word alone can rightfully connect us to the truth. There may be God-ordained helps for us to understand the Bible—such as experience (John 9:24-25), Christian community (Acts 17:10-11), reason (Isa. 1:18), and sacred history (Heb. 11-12:1)—but all of these things are fallible and none of them is an authority. Only what is clearly taught in the Bible is necessary for salvation. The Bible alone can set the standard for general Christian principles and fellowship in our churches.

Comment [L10]: Reference?

Inspired of God or "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16-17) means the Holy Spirit lifted the understanding of the speakers and writers above human limitations to give the Scriptures divine authority. Thus Paul could write, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:12-13 NKJV).

Comment [L11]: Translation?

We believe God spoke, using human words to convey divine truth.

We read in Jude 1:3, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints". Therefore, the Bible reflects the culture and environment of the writers as they studied and wrote. God was guiding in such a way that the written truth was his Word. It is thus the infallible authority in everything Christians believe and do.

Comment [L12]: Translation?

The Bible is made up of 66 separate books written across many centuries. It was written by various individuals who spoke different languages and who came from a variety of economic and social situations. Yet incredibly, these very diverse authors declare the same God, thus revealing the hand of God in both its inspiration and preservation through time. The Bible is comprised of 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Each was inspired by God and all were brought together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to form what is called the canon of Holy Scripture, the Bible. The Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. affirmed those 39 books recognized as the sacred Word given first to the Israelites. The Council of Carthage in 419 A.D. affirmed the 27 books of the New Testament. These church leaders studied the books carefully for specific internal evidence of inspiration. They also examined the external evidence for their apostolic and prophetic authenticity, following specific criteria by which a book claiming to be Scripture either authenticated or disqualified itself. Consequently these councils did not vote on these books with the majority vote winning, but rather discerned, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which books already carried the stamp of the Spirit's inspiration, and which did not. We recognize with the early Church the Bible as genuine and authentic writings with prophetic and apostolic authority, God's inspired Word. Thus, we believe that these 66 books together are the Word of God.

We believe the central message of the Bible is the creative and redemptive work of God in history.

A great drama unfolds to us in the pages of the Bible as we see the Creation (Gen. 1-2), the Fall (Gen. 3), and the redemption of humanity (John 3:17) parallel with the life (John 1:14), death (Mark 15), and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28). We see the Creation, despite its original splendor and perfection, now suffering a fallen state because of human sin (Rom. 8:19-22). We see God, because of his great love and mercy, sending prophets and establishing a corrective system to call people to him and to reveal his character and purposes (Ex. 34:5-7; Heb. 1:1). We see God sending Christ, the only begotten Son (John 3:16), to teach and exemplify love and truth (Phil. 2:5-7; Acts 10:38), die an atoning death (1 John 2:2), be resurrected from the dead, abolish death (1 Cor. 15:3-6), and ascend to Heaven to be glorified (Acts 1:9-11). We see our call to participate in this redemptive process (2 Cor. 5:18-20, Phil. 2:12-13) and that a day has been appointed when he will bodily return and complete the already commenced Kingdom where he will reign as Lord (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

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We believe proper interpretation of the Bible comes from the Holy Spirit.

"First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for prophesy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20 RSV). We believe the Bible is entrusted to the Church to be proclaimed throughout the world. The Church is the Body of Christ under his headship and guided by the Holy Spirit. The unity of that body is vital to the effective proclamation of God's Word. Therefore, we understand that the interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is **guided by** the collective understanding of the body.

The Bible is not to be used as a collection of proof-texts, nor is it designed to instruct us by isolated passages, which, torn from their original context, give us no clear guidance; but when the Bible is read and interpreted as a whole it gives us a spiritual sensitivity to regulate our thoughts and feelings, and thereby to influence and direct our theology and conduct (Acts 2:42, 17:10-11).

We believe that the Holy Spirit remains at work applying the Bible to the life of the believer.

As the Holy Spirit was active in the inspiration, canonicity and preservation of the Bible and remains active in the interpretation of it, so the Spirit also works in applying the Bible to the life of the believer and the church. In Jesus' prayer for *"those who will believe on me through their (apostles') word"* our Lord prayed that God would *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:17). Consequently we can expect the Holy Spirit's work, not just in our understanding as we read the Bible; but to use it as one of the usual instruments, in our daily walk, to transform us into the likeness of Christ. The apostle says that the Word of God is to dwell richly in us. The believer who studies the Bible in a humble dependence on God will treasure up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of the Bible in their minds. They will acquire from the Holy Spirit a spiritual "taste," which enables them to perceive the right and wrong path in the particular situations of their lives with a sharp degree of precision, much like a trained musical ear can judge good or bad sounds imperceptible to the untrained ear. As God uses the Bible in our daily walk, we are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in the heart, and by a concern for the glory of God, which becomes our great passion.

Comment [L13]: Translation?

We believe original infallible manuscripts were written in Hebrew, Greek and other biblical languages.

Translations into numerous languages have given many people the opportunity to read the Bible in their dialects. Changes in language and new archeological discoveries of manuscripts closer to the originals make the translation of Scriptures a constant, continuing process. Each translation should be evaluated on clarity in communicating the Gospel. Translations from the best available manuscripts, primarily Hebrew and Greek, preserve the infallible authority of the Bible as God's Word. Translations prepared by a committee offer a system of checks and balances which may not be true in those prepared by an individual.

We believe that it is a sin to divide the Church over minor theoretical distinctions regarding how the Bible was inspired by God.

For the purpose of interest we welcome and respect informed theories regarding the way in which God has inspired the Prophets and Apostles to produce the Holy Scriptures. But we very much regret the numerous and violent divisions of the Church in the past caused by human speculations regarding inerrancy and infallibility, textual inerrancy and inerrancy of content and such related topics.

The great majority of Christians understand the terms "inerrancy", "infallibility" and "God-inspired" as virtually interchangeable. Technical distinctions, dogmatically put forward, will not strengthen their faith or assist in their sanctification. The past has revealed that the only real fruit that has ever proceeded from asserting these "distinctions" is disharmony and division in the Body of Christ (Matt. 12:25; Eph. 4:3; Titus 3:9-11). It may be observed in the case of nearly all of these divisions that authorities on both sides maintained that the Bible was the Christian standard for faith and practice.

Our identity in the Churches of God, General Conference is that of a Bible-only or *sola-scriptura* group. Our concern has never been to bring forth the most clever human theories regarding the nature of the Bible, but instead what God says about the Bible. In other words, we want to know what the Bible says about itself: that it is a lamp to our feet (Ps. 19), that it is God-inspired, profitable and complete (2 Tim. 3), that it works co-extensively with the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26, 17:17), and every other clear claim the Bible makes about itself.

Comment [CoGGC14]: Revision or deletion suggested for this heading.

HUMANITY

We believe that God made Humanity in his image.

"God said, 'Let us make man in our image...in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:26-27 NIV). Genesis 1:27 affirms that humanity is both male and female, and that the fullness of the image of God is seen in male and female.

We believe that God created all people with equal value.

Galatians 3:26-29 (along with Genesis and much of Jesus' ministry) makes it clear that in Jesus Christ all people are made equal in value, standing and personhood.

God desires that all people have the opportunity to be in relationship with him (John 3:16). In both Old Testament and New, God can call anyone into service and ministry with him. And his call is not limited by sex, race, nationality, social, or economic standing. (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:10, Eph. 4:10-16).

We believe that being human is both physical and spiritual in nature.

Genesis 2-7 says, "...the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (TNIV). This shows us that we are like the rest of creation, which is made of material "stuff" that has been animated by the power and Spirit of God. But humanity is the only creature made in the image of God, which carries more meaning than just a physical image. This includes the endowment of the characteristics of God, but does not make us God, nor do we have the potential to be God (Deut. 6:8).

In order to have God's characteristics, we must also be spirit or have a soul. The human soul is an eternal component (Matt. 10:28) of our nature that is designed for communion with God (Ezek. 18:4). Our soul is designed to love God, to long for God (Ps. 42:1) and is restored by God (Ps. 23:3). Our soul can experience the brokenness of our existence and drift from our God-centered design (Ps. 42). Our soul can praise God (Ps. 103:1) and can find fulfillment in satisfaction of longings (Prov. 3:19). And our souls find rest in living according to God's purposes and plans (Matt. 11:25-30).

Humanity is often described as having heart, mind, body, spirit, and soul (Deut. 6:8; Mark 12:29-30; Heb. 4:12-13). To simplify the picture, it is helpful to see that these are all together, both spiritual and physical things intertwined in the human experience. Our physical bodies are finite, they will wear out, and our soul is eternal. But, the two of them living and functioning together bring about a unique set of attributes (thought, will, and emotion). The mind, spirit and heart could be translated as the thoughts, will, and emotions. These are not separate components of a human person, but can be thought of as expressions or experiences of the two main components of humanity, body and soul, working together.

Although our bodies will wear out, the human design involves both body and soul. Our eternal experience with God, after life here, will also involve being body and soul. And our bodies will be made new when Christ returns to wrap up God's plans for this world (Isa. 26:19; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

We believe humanity is a unique creation.

There is no mention of any other creature having a soul. Animals share the "breath of life," but Scripture is silent on whether animals have an eternal soul (Gen. 1:30; Eccles. 3:21). We believe that humankind is distinctly and uniquely made, and above creation. We also believe that, although there are similarities among living things and our DNA structures, there is a designed complexity to humanity that was not intended for the rest of created things (Ps. 8). Further support for this understanding is in a simple translation of the words used in Genesis 1:1—*bara*: to "make" all of creation, and Genesis 1:26—*yatzar*: to "form/make" humankind. *Bara* means to form out of nothing (ex nihilo), and *yatzar* means to form out of what already exists. This is intended to convey an additional fashioning or designing, and in the case of humanity is clearly the added complexity to be "in the image of God." Even the language of the Scriptures agrees that we share DNA and other common structures with the rest of creation—but our design was in addition to and beyond what God did for the rest of creation.

We believe that humanity was made to display God's character in life and work.

Genesis 1:26 can be translated, "*let us make man in our image, to resemble us, and let them rule*". This clearly indicates God intended humanity to be a reflection of him and for our work to resemble his work. Part of humanity's reflection of God's character is the ability to create and multiply. Scriptures show that we are given the ability to multiply physically and spiritually. Genesis 1:28 shows the physical multiplication in procreation when we are commanded to "*be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it*". Add to this the unique abilities given to humanity to create music, art, feats of engineering, etc. and we see that every aspect of human life and design was meant to reflect the image of God through the things

Comment [L15]: References to original language were to be eliminated.

Comment [L16]: Translation?

Comment [L17]: Translation?

817 we do (Eph. 2:10). This responsibility to create physically comes through the authority God gave us to be
818 stewards of and workers in creation (Gen. 2:15). Men and women share in this responsibility individually
819 and together (Gen. 2:21-23).

820 The spiritual responsibility to multiply we see most clearly in Jesus' command that "as we are going into
821 all the world, we should make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of
822 the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19 NKJV). Jesus' command indicates we join him in this "as we
823 are going"—which means it is in every facet, moment, and season of life. Multiplication is both an
824 individual and a community responsibility as we reflect God's creative nature. This is often called our
825 great co-mission with God, and is not possible apart from God. Personal discipleship and the planting of
826 new churches are two significant ways we see this being applied in the Church.

827 God had a plan for those who would listen and follow Jesus. His plan was that they be conformed to the
828 likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Jesus' sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension restores humanity to a right
829 relationship with God, because Jesus is the Son of God—part of the Trinity (John 14:23-26, 16:15, 17:20-
830 26). And this relationship transforms/conforms every aspect of our life and work to be like Christ (Rom.
831 8:28-30). As Ephesians 2:6-7 says, "...God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the
832 heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches
833 of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (NIV). This means that in Jesus Christ
834 humanity has a spiritual and physical connection with God since Jesus was resurrected and ascended to
835 sit at the right hand of God with his physical body intact and renewed (John 20:24-30; Acts 1:9). And it
836 means our spiritual and physical life will be transformed in relationship with God.

837 Through active belief in and intimacy with Christ, humanity has the presence of the Holy Spirit who
838 leads us into all truth and empowers us to carry out God's purposes (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 12:7).

839 Through an active faith relationship with Christ, humanity is intimately connected to God, and is able to
840 live out the fullness of the image of God empowered with the unique attributes of the persons of the
841 Trinity. This is what it means to be God's witnesses as the Church, literally his reflection and living
842 representatives in and for the world and for the heavenly realms. (Eph. 3:10-12).

843
844 **We believe Humanity is given the freedom to choose.**

845 Adam and Eve chose to disobey God in the Garden (Gen. 3). The issue of choice is always one of
846 relationship. It's not that God was surprised by their choice, but rather the only way to have relationship
847 was to have the choice not to have it (Gen. 3:17). God indicates Adam and Eve could listen to the serpent
848 over and against God.

849 We are free to live and think and act according to our own will (Josh. 24:15; John 1:12, 6:67). These
850 Scriptures and a cursory reading of both Old and New Testaments clearly indicate that we have freedom
851 to accept or reject God, to obey or disobey. However, God does set boundaries on human behavior.
852 Freedom has always come in some framework of restrictions. One of those restrictions comes in the
853 inability to nullify the consequences of our negative decisions. Another would be when our freedom of
854 choice would nullify a sovereign choice of God. We are not free to be God as some persons would like
855 (Gen. 3:1-6). We are creature, not Creator.

856 All persons experience inner tension between the desire to do right and the pressure to do wrong. This
857 was true for the rich young ruler whose story is told in Mark 10:17-22. He freely chose his course of action
858 and was accountable for his decision. This is true for all of us. "So then, each of us shall give account of
859 himself to God" (Rom. 14:12 KJV).

860 We believe by God's grace that people are free to choose to walk with Christ or not walk with Christ
861 throughout their lifetimes. What God does in regard to our salvation is God's decision in regard to our
862 hearts (God looks at the heart). Our choice is to walk or not walk with God by faith, and God's work is this:
863 "But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight,
864 without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved
865 from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to
866 every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant" (Col. 1:22-23 NIV). Grace
867 remains the active power in providing salvation for God's people. Faith serves as the vehicle of delivery
868 for that grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is
869 the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9 NIV).

870 Christians do not have to live in constant fear of being lost. Believers are assured of their position with
871 Christ. Relationship with God is not broken every time the Christian fails. John says, "I write this to you so
872 that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—
873 Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1 NIV). Christians are also promised, "If we confess our sins,
874 He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV).

Comment [L18]: Consider changing to active voice, "The Holy Spirit is present with those persons who are in a saving faith relationship with Christ."

Comment [L19]: This is unclear. Consider better wording.

Comment [L20]: To be consistent with the following sentence, consider rewording: "The issue of relationship is always one of choice."

875 We believe God provides power for living a victorious Christian life. As Christians remain in Christ, He
876 remains in them (John 15:4). The Lord has said, "...Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Heb.
877 13:5 NIV). We may forsake God but God will not forsake us.

878 "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,
879 He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13 NIV). Because "it is God
880 who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:13 NIV), God's people can
881 approach life with a sense of victory.

882 Our choices of who/what to trust or have faith in, will affect our eternal destiny. (Hab. 2:4; Josh. 22:15-
883 20; Matt. 5:17-21; John 3:16-18, 15:5-6; Rom. 3:21-24; Eph. 2:8-10).

884 The issue of choice and relationship with Jesus does not limit God's sovereignty and authority over
885 creation, but speaks to his justice and the reality that God desires us to love him freely—not by force.
886

887 **We believe that humanity is broken and separated from God by sin.**

888 Genesis 3 shares the account of humanity's choice to know good and evil, and be like God. Adam and
889 Eve chose to eat from the tree from which God had commanded them not to eat. The opportunity to
890 choose was an issue of relationship. The choice to take matters into their own hands was an act of self-
891 will or disobedience to God's will. This selfish act by Adam and Eve brought a separation from the
892 intimate relationship God had intended to have with them. And since humanity was charged with ruling
893 over creation, their separation from God led to the separation of all creation from God. This is what we
894 call "the Fall."

895 When used in the Old Testament, the word *sin* is most simply translated from the Hebrew as "missing
896 the mark." When we choose to go our own way apart from God we are sinning, missing God's
897 plans/design for us, and it will lead us to death and destruction instead of the life God intended (Prov.
898 14:12; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 2:13).

899 Every human being was designed to be in relationship with God and to have his guidance. Every
900 human being is accountable for his or her choices. Apart from God, humanity's natural course is one of
901 selfish desires and destruction (Rom. 1:18-32). Unless we choose to let God intervene and lead our lives
902 through Jesus Christ, we will continue to choose our own paths and be in sin and separation from God
903 (Ps. 51:7-13; Rom. 3:21-24; James 4:17). This leads not only to destructive consequences in our
904 lifetimes, but also to eternal separation from God—a second and eternal death (Rev. 21:8).
905

906 **We believe God's plan for humanity includes healing for the whole person.**

907 The Lord is continually at work in us, healing our emotional and psychological wounds, and setting us
908 free from the bondage and deeply ingrained patterns of our fallen nature. With the power that raised
909 Jesus from the dead, he gradually but masterfully transforms us from within (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:17). As
910 we are conformed to the image of Christ, we discover more and more that in him is the only place we find
911 peace (Eph. 2:14).

912 In his love and grace Jesus always affirms us, and yet he draws us toward maturity and goodness.
913 Because much of our brokenness and suffering is the outgrowth of our own foolishness and obstinacy, he
914 enables us, as we face consequences, to learn from our failures, to discover our inadequacies, and to cry
915 out to him for help. He urges us to grow ever deeper in our trust and understanding of him, and in the
916 living out of our faith "...that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and
917 in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of
918 Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

919 Jesus stated that his purpose was to come so that we "may have life and life to the full" (John 10:10).
920 From Scripture we have pictures that show us that a "full" life is both celebration and mourning, laughter
921 and tears (Eccles. 3). As Jesus works in us to heal, restore, and free us from our fallen and willful nature,
922 he redeems every experience and puts them in the perspective of God's grace (Rom. 8). This healing
923 work of Jesus in us progresses until it is completed for all eternity (Rev. 7:17; 21:4).
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REGENERATION

New Birth

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We believe in the New Birth, or regeneration.

The doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, is an essential teaching of the Churches of God. This belief comes from the declaration of Christ to Nicodemus, *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'"* (John 3:7 NASB).

Regeneration is the radical transformation of an individual life from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Christ speaks in Matthew of the necessity of becoming "like children." The disciples came to Jesus with the question, *"Who, then, is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus set a little child in their midst. Then he declared, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'"* (Matt. 18:1-4 NASB).

Christ teaches the necessity of entering a new way of life. Through regeneration a new life is made possible by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It involves a new relationship to God, a new relationship to others, and a new attitude toward the world.

We believe we must respond to God's offer.

This new life is a supernatural change. It comes to the individual not by human efforts, but by the power and influence of God. This truth is expressed by John, who speaks of persons *"which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:13 KJV). God does not give new life to someone who is not willing to be changed. God offers salvation, but does not force any person to receive it. God does not destroy or alter our free moral choice to accept or reject this offer.

To experience regeneration, we must recognize our need for a new life, and that Jesus Christ is the only way to receive it. *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12 NIV). This involves recognizing one's sinfulness, both sins we commit and sins of omission. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23 KJV). *"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17 NASB).

All who are in a state of accountability before God need regeneration. This means their spiritual understanding has matured to the point that they are capable of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They are able both to understand their own personal sinfulness and to respond to God independently. Although often occurring in later childhood, this may vary according to the spiritual perceptiveness and mental capacity of the person (see Presentation of Children).

We must recognize that our sin is separating us from God, and must be willing to repent. Repentance means willingness to confess sinfulness and to turn from a sinful life. With repentance comes God's forgiveness. *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord"* (Acts 3:19 NIV).

Through a sincere response to the marvelous forgiving love of God, Christ comes into our lives and makes us new. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come"* (2 Cor. 5:17 RSV).

JUSTIFICATION

A New Standing before God

We believe that justification comes by faith in Christ and his atoning work, and not by works of the law, or merits of the individual.

Justification means to be put in a right relation to God. We believe that the mediating work of Jesus Christ on the cross gives a person right relationship with God. This brings a sinner into the family of God. Jesus restores the relationship between the believing sinner and God (1 Tim. 2:5). God and the justified sinner are now in a harmonious relationship. God declares the sinner righteous because of the sacrifice of Christ.

The teaching of justification by faith alone separates biblical Christianity from all other religions. All other religions teach some type of justification before God based on the deeds and merits of the individual.

The Bible presents justification by faith in the person of Christ alone, and in his sacrificial work on the cross. Justification is a legal declaration that though guilty, a person is not culpable (held responsible) because he has placed his faith in the atoning death of Christ. The person trusts Christ, not his or her own righteousness. *“But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness”* (Rom. 4:5).

Justification is an act of God whereby he makes and declares the sinner righteous based on the shed blood of Christ. Paul says in Romans 5:9: *“Much more then being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him”*. This act of justification occurs simultaneously with regeneration (the giving of new life) and puts a sinner in right relation to God. The repentant and believing sinner is cleansed from sin, released from its penalty and is viewed as righteous before God. *“And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”* (Phil. 3:9).

This act of justification is not based on human effort. Paul states that we know *“that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ”* (Gal. 2:16). It is a free gift and is given by the grace of God in response to the faith of the individual. All of the demands of the law are met in Christ (Rom. 5:19).

We believe that Scripture teaches four essential results which occur at justification: remission, restoration, God-given righteousness, and a new relationship with God as his child.

1. *Remission* means that the justified believer is freed from the demands of the law, because those demands have been satisfied in Christ. Paul states in Romans 3:24 that a person justified by grace is *“set free”* (redeemed) by Jesus Christ. From what is the justified believer freed? He or she is set free from the demands of the law. This is not just a pardon, but a declaration that the sinner’s guilt is erased by God. The believer is forgiven and set free.

2. *Restoration* means that Christ now represents the justified believer. His righteousness is now yours. Faith in Christ restores a person to perfection in the sight of God. It is as if the person never sinned. *“Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom. 5:1). The person owes no more debt to God. The sinner and God are no longer separated. Christ gives peace and restoration. God now accepts the justified believer as “righteous.”

3. *God-given righteousness* means believers are made right with God because of Christ’s work and presence in the believer. We are told that: *“Jesus became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness ...”* (1 Cor. 1:30). Righteousness from Christ was *“put to our account.”* We were in sin and now God considers us righteous because of the sacrificial death of Christ. Because of this righteousness, a justified believer is considered a child of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:4-5).

4. This *new relationship* is based on an exchange of position. Christ took the place of the sinner. Judgment was pronounced at the cross. Christ was crucified on our behalf. When a person believes in Jesus, he or she now stands in the righteousness of Christ. There is an exchange of position as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“For He (God) made Him who knew no sin (Christ), to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”*. This new standing includes adoption, with the believer being adopted into God’s family at justification (Rom. 8:15). All the blessings God has for his children culminating in the resurrection of the body, now belong to the believer (Gal. 4:5, Rom. 8:23).

These essential results of being justified by faith in Jesus Christ come apart from the works of the law. This Christian distinctive of how a person becomes righteous in God’s sight is a foundational pillar of what the Churches of God believes. It is at the heart of the Gospel.

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SANCTIFICATION

A Life Set Apart

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We believe sanctification is positional, progressive and ultimately complete in Christ.

The biblical concept of sanctification is the process of bringing the whole of life in line with the will of God. Its basic meaning is to set life apart in consecration of one's total self to God until complete conformity to Christ is achieved at death. To sanctify anything is to declare that it is holy and belongs completely to God.

In the Old Testament, sanctification was primarily used to consecrate places, days, seasons and objects of worship (Gen. 2:3; Lev. 27:14; Ex. 19:23, 39:44). However, New Testament usage portrays a Savior who was so completely consecrated to God that those who believe in him can also be sanctified (John 17:17-22). Sanctification then refers to the process of consecrating the regenerate persons that are called to be set apart, most holy, saints (Rom. 1:7).

Sanctification is God's in that it happens instantaneously and simultaneously with regeneration (1 Cor. 6:11). Sanctification is also progressive as it is a continuing growth in grace, truth, and relationship with God (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 1:5-7). Sanctification is also complete in that all who have the indwelling Holy Spirit will be delivered completely from sin at glorification (see Last Things) as sons and daughters of God (Gal. 3:26-4:6).

Justification is God's imputed work on us; sanctification is God's imparted work in us. While justification refers to a change in status before God, sanctification refers to a change within one's being because of the relationship believers enjoy with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). This change in being begins at the time of regeneration when believers receive the Holy Spirit and is realized in a continual growth toward Christ-likeness (Rom. 8:29-30). It could be said that sanctification is to regeneration what growth is to birth.

We believe transformation of the believer's life and character flows from our relationship to God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Those who belong to Christ are called to live in relationship with Him. *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,"* (Eph. 4:1 NKJV). *"You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts in the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on His throne at the right side of God. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your real life is Christ and when He appears, then you too will appear with Him and share His glory"* (Col. 3:1-4 TEV; also Col. 3:5-14; Rom. 6-8).

The God-given ability to make one's lifestyle more Christ-like occurs through the relationship between the believer and the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:26; Gal. 5:22-23) and not through human effort (Gal. 3:3). Sanctification is a lifelong process, daily appropriated through surrender of life to God. While sanctification is not complete in any given act, there may be experiences in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit that lead to greater yielding to God and holiness. Sanctification is not complete short of the life to come (1 John 3:2). Glorification is the end of the process of sanctification (1 Cor. 15:42-57).

We believe it is the privilege and responsibility of believers to live holy lives.

Holiness is a characteristic of God and should mark the Christian walk. *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy because I am holy'"* (1 Pet. 1:15-16 NIV). This is a command, but also implies that believers are to choose to be holy. We continue to be free moral agents throughout the process of sanctification. Holiness does not mean sinless perfection, or that at some point our fallen nature is eradicated. Sin and our fallen nature continue to be present with us throughout this life (Rom. 7:17; Gal. 5:17). Yet God wants holy people and the believer must deliberately decide to yield life to the Holy Spirit to be holy. Therefore, sanctification in the life of the believer is a life-long process of choosing control by the new nature through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Holy living is possible only as the believer experiences a moment-by-moment yielding to the Holy Spirit. It is not that the believer gets more of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is always completely available to all believers. It is just that yielding allows the believer to experience more of the Holy Spirit already living in relationship with him (Eph. 5:18).

Followers of Christ depend on the power and help of the Holy Spirit to produce Christ's life in us. Paul said, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will"* (Rom. 12:1-2 NIV). *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

1084 *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and*
1085 *envying each other” (Gal. 5:22-26 NIV). Holy living is the believer’s privilege and responsibility because it*
1086 *will bring honor and glory to God.*
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DRAFT

THE CHURCH

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We believe the Church is God's called-out people.

The New Testament word for Church denotes "that which is called out." The Church is the called-together assembly of God's people. God called the Church into being at the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Only by God's mercy and grace is the salvation of sinful beings made possible.

The Church exists only because of the grace of God and the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It consists of all persons who accept Christ as personal Savior and Lord, leading a regenerate life. The Church is composed of all who have responded to the Holy Spirit's call through the saving love of his Son, Jesus Christ. Just as God called Israel to be his chosen people under the Old Covenant, God is now calling the Church to be the new Israel under the New Covenant (Rom. 4:16).

We believe the Church is the Body of Christ.

One of the significant images of the Church in the Scriptures is the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4-16). The Church as the Body of Christ is affirmed "*so in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others*" (Rom. 12:5 NIV).

All Christians are important to the effective working of the Body of Christ, even though we may differ in spiritual gifts, in national origin, or in social standing. Even parts which seem weaker are indispensable. The unity of the Body of Christ lies not in the sameness of its parts, but in its "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*" (Eph. 4:5-6 NIV). No Christian can live apart from the Body of Christ any more than a hand or a foot can live apart from the human body. Christ is "*...head of the body, the church;...*" (Col. 1:18 NIV). All true Christians respond to him as Lord. Those ruled by Christ recognize that their lives form God's temple and that he dwells within their fellowship (1 Cor. 3:16).

The Church is often called the people of God. Christians are described as "*...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...*" (1 Pet. 2:9 NIV).

We believe that God calls and equips men and women in leadership and ministry for the Church.

We believe that the calling and gifting of God, not gender, are the essential prerequisites for service and leadership in the Church. In Galatians 3:26-29 we read, "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (NIV). The Apostle Paul makes a clear reference to all people being the same in relationship to their standing with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Body of Christ, there are no differences in regards to gender, culture, economy, or geo-political boundaries when it comes to salvation or service.

However, some seemingly confusing passages need to be considered in light of women being in positions of leadership in the Church. For instance in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, the Apostle Paul states, "*...As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church*" (NIV). This is one of the most used texts to keep women quiet, as is 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. It is important to see such texts in the whole light of Scripture.

Previously in 1 Corinthians 11:5-6 Paul writes, "*And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head*" (NIV). It appears to be acceptable for a woman to pray and prophesy in public in this previous text, but this privilege seems to be refuted later in the fourteenth chapter. In fact, Paul's practice of cooperation with women in ministry would seem to belie the injunctions to limit women's role in the Church. Since Scripture is not contradictory to itself, it suggests that our understanding of the New Testament Church and such texts is incomplete. Perhaps women are given the right of speaking and praying, but concerning idle chatter they (and men) should remain silent.

Basically we believe that all persons should be permitted to serve Christ and the Church in the same capacities today as they did in the New Testament. This means that men and women should be set free to serve as God directs and do so for his glory and never out of selfish ambition.

1147 **We believe the Church enjoys a special kind of fellowship.**
1148 The quality of life in the Church is best expressed by the term "fellowship." The New Testament word
1149 for fellowship suggests a special relationship rooted in the Christian's common fellowship with the Father
1150 through the Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; Phil. 2:1-4).

1151 Common worship is an important factor in establishing and maintaining fellowship. Early Christians
1152 "...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to
1153 prayer" (Acts 2:42 NIV). Christians are to come together to encourage one another, to help one another,
1154 to show love, to do good, and to bear one another's burdens (Heb. 10:25; Gal. 6:2).

1155 The Church in the New Testament is the household of faith and the family of God (Eph. 2:19). Paul
1156 encourages the Church to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring
1157 one another" (Rom. 12:10 KJV). The Ephesians are instructed to "be imitators of God, therefore, as
1158 dearly loved children" (Eph. 5:1 NIV). The relationship between a husband and wife is compared to the
1159 love between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:21-33). Christians are reminded that "he who loves God
1160 should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21 NIV).

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1162 **We believe the purpose of the Church is to proclaim God's redemptive mission.**

1163 We believe God commissioned the Church to declare the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. We believe
1164 the Church does that primarily through worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, and service. In
1165 worship, we stand in awe of God's power and celebrate God's love for us (Ps. 105:2-3). In worship, we
1166 respond by giving God glory, honor, and praise through music, prayer, testimony, and the reading and
1167 teaching of Scripture (Ps. 95:6-7). In fellowship, believers gather together, living out our commitment
1168 to love one another. In evangelism, we desire the Holy Spirit to add to the Church those who by God's grace
1169 are saved through Jesus. In discipleship, we follow the call to teach and obey all things commanded by
1170 him. In service, we care for one another and seek to meet the physical, mental, social, and emotional
1171 needs of others (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37).

1172 Jesus commissioned the Church to make disciples of all people. We believe we are called to share the
1173 Gospel in every culture and among all peoples (Matt. 28:19-20). The central purpose of the Church is to
1174 proclaim salvation through Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).

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1176 **We believe Jesus chooses to minister his work of reconciliation and wholeness primarily through
1177 his Body, which is now the Church.**

1178 Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to be actively engaged in his work of new creation through us,
1179 as we experience, proclaim and demonstrate his love. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new
1180 creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through
1181 Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
1182 not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor.
1183 5:17-19 NIV).

1184 In partial fulfillment of his covenantal charge to share in his dominion, God includes his new creation,
1185 the Church, in the process of calling and reconciling the world unto himself (2 Cor. 5:17). As we carry the
1186 Gospel into the world, and demonstrate his love and grace in the reality of our lives, we create a loving
1187 context in which his reconciliation and re-creation can take place (Matt. 5:23-24).

1188 The Church, as a living expression of Christ's redemptive reality, can provide a rare opportunity in this
1189 world to experience God's unconditional love. As people are welcomed and accepted as they are, they
1190 can be listened to and affirmed as valuable and unique persons who were designed in the image of God.
1191 In relationship with the Body of Christ, they can experience healing of heart and soul offered nowhere
1192 else (1 John 4:7-16). As such the Church through the Gospel must be committed to reconciliation
1193 between peoples across all divides, whether they are cultural, racial, economic, social, etc.

1194 The Church also can provide a gracious context in which people can experience truly loving
1195 relationships. Here they can begin to discover the truth about themselves, be given the opportunity of
1196 becoming the reshaped persons God designed them to be, and gradually grow to be unique agents of
1197 God's grace and reconciliation (2 Tim. 2:1; 2 Pet. 3:18).

1198 As Christ is building just one Church, he works and intercedes toward his ultimate end of making us
1199 truly one. Though many issues distinguish us from our brothers and sisters in Christ in other
1200 denominations, Jesus calls us to hold tightly to the faith we have received, and yet to offer freedom and
1201 grace in matters open to varying perspectives, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me
1202 and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21
1203 NIV).

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We believe the local church is a part of the Christian Church of all believers.

We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only head of the Church. The Church is the union of all believers of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord who desire to see every human being come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Church is the collective effort of all local churches to participate in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The local church seeks to serve in harmony with the Christian Church of all believers in order to effectively advance the Kingdom of God (1 Pet. 3:8). The Church enjoys a special kind of unity that transcends time. Jesus' prayer for the Church was that the Church would be united as one (John 17:21). Despite differences, there is oneness in the Church. It is the common bond of love in Jesus Christ that unifies the Church (Col. 3:14).

We believe the Church is to apply biblical principles in every area of its life.

Throughout its history, the Churches of God, General Conference, has maintained the importance of a strong doctrine of the Church, seeing it as basic to sound Christian theology. The Church's doctrines of regeneration, the ordinances, church government, and church discipline are all affected by its doctrine of the Church and the high importance placed upon biblical principles.

From its inception the Churches of God, General Conference, has maintained a high view of the Church. A thorough study of the Scriptures reveals that the name "Church of God" is the best biblical name for the Church (1 Cor. 1:2 and others); that the presbyterial system of elders (Acts 14:23) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:10) is the biblical form of church government; and that the new birth through Jesus Christ is the only way of entering the Church (1 John 5:1-5).

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THE ORDINANCES

Services to Remember

We believe Christ has given the Church three divine ordinances.

The term "ordinance" refers to a practice or ceremony that is commanded to be observed. Under the Old Covenant, God directed his people to keep certain festivals as a perpetual memorial observance. In regard to the Passover celebration he said, *"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance"* (Ex. 12:14 NIV). From then until now Israel continues to observe a number of celebratory feasts and rituals to commemorate God's redemptive acts. In like manner the Church also observes ordinances to remember and celebrate God's great act of redemption under the New Covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Israel was directed to keep the ordinances, it is incumbent upon all Christians in every time and place to live up to Jesus' directive to keep the ordinances he instituted.

Based upon Jesus' direct command and personal example, The Churches of God, General Conference affirms and practices three perpetual ordinances: feetwashing, the Lord's supper and baptism. Note the term *ordinance* instead of *sacrament*. Sacrament is not used because in its historical development it implies the imparting of saving grace. God uniquely blesses members of the family of God as they participate in these special acts of worship (John 13:17), but salvation comes only from believing on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). Therefore, observance of the ordinances is not required for or to maintain personal salvation, nor is it a requirement for church membership in the Churches of God, General Conference. In addition any true believer in Christ is welcomed and encouraged to participate in the ordinances regardless of membership status.

The three ordinances call to remembrance the full story of salvation in Jesus' coming, his passion and his ultimate glorification (Phil. 2:6-11). They memorialize Jesus Christ's mission, atonement and resurrection. They also remind believers of their own call to service, their redemption and their ultimate victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ, our Lord. The following chart summarizes what constitutes an ordinance, giving the biblical foundations and showing what each teaches about Jesus and Christian living. The three ordinances compliment each other.

The Ordinance:	Feetwashing	Lord's Supper	Baptism
Divine Authority:	John 13:1-11	Luke 22:14-20	Matthew. 3:13-17
Jesus' Example/Command	John 13:12-17	Mark 14:22-26	Matthew 28:16-20
Material Elements:	Towel, Water & Basin	Bread & Wine	Water
The Symbolic Reminders	Philippians 2:1-11	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	Romans 6:1-7
Redemptive History:	Incarnation & Public Ministry	Crucifixion & Death	Burial & Resurrection
The Christ Event	John 1:1-14	1 Corinthians 10:16	Romans 6:8-14
Spiritual Experience:	Cleansing & Humble Service	Salvation & Witness	New Life & Obedience
The Practical Application	Matthew 20:25-28	Galatians 2:20	Colossians 2:11, 12
Formal Observance:	Each of the ordinances is celebrated by the Church in a service of worship that honors the Lord Jesus Christ and reminds believers of their great salvation.		

BAPTISM

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We believe in the ordinance of baptism as a celebration of our new life in Christ.

Baptism is an ordinance of the Church and though not essential for salvation and/or Church membership, it is essential for obedience to Christ's command. Jesus commissioned his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19 RSV).

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward grace. When we believe in and commit ourselves to following Christ, a fundamental change takes place. We receive God's acceptance, forgiveness, and direction for living. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17 NIV). Baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer's participation in that divine process.

The ordinance of baptism is a public symbol. When we are baptized, we are giving public witness that we believe in Christ and are committed to following him.

We recognize a relationship between the baptism of the believer and the baptism of Jesus. Although the Scriptures teach that Jesus was without sin, he nevertheless submitted to the baptism administered by John the Baptist.

The baptism of Jesus signified three things:

- 1) Obedience to God the Father. Regarding his baptism, "Jesus replied, Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15 NIV).
- 2) Servanthood. By being baptized Jesus expressed his incarnate presence among us, as one of us, to serve us.
- 3) Acceptance of the sin-bearing ministry of the cross. Because Jesus had no sin, his baptism anticipated the sin he would bear for us on Calvary's cross. The Baptist said, "...Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 NIV).

We practice believer's baptism.

Those who profess faith in Christ and express commitment to follow him are eligible for baptism. The early Church made confession and repentance prerequisites for baptism. Peter said, "...Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38 NIV). The Ethiopian official asked Philip, "...Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36 NIV).

Since baptism properly comes after an expressed faith in Christ and conscious commitment to follow him, only believers are qualified candidates for baptism.

Because we believe that only willing response to God by the individual brings salvation, the Churches of God neither practices nor sees the necessity of infant baptism. We trust that those who have not yet reached the state of accountability are safe in the grace of God (Rom. 7:7-12). Nonetheless, we believe that the child shares the benefits of Christian fellowship in the nurturing ministries of responsible parents and the Church. This responsibility is accepted and made meaningful in the service of Presentation of Children for the Lord's Blessing (2 Sam. 12:23; Luke 18:15-16).

We believe the biblical form of baptism is by immersion.

Matthew's report of John's ministry is, "Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Matt. 3:6 NIV). Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus' baptism. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water..." (Matt. 3:16 NIV), and "As Jesus was coming up out of the water..." (Mark 1:10 NIV). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, "...both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him" (Acts 8:38 NIV). The Scripture concludes, "They came up out of the water..." (v. 39).

The Bible says immersion was the form administered by John the Baptist and the apostles. Paul's explanation of the symbolism of baptism confirms that immersion is the form to be used. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4 NIV). It has been our practice to administer baptism using the form as outlined in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

FEETWASHING

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We believe in the ordinance of footwashing as a celebration of the incarnation.

We remember in this ordinance that Jesus Christ is the Word, which became flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). In the words of Philippians 2:7-8, Jesus *"emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"* (RSV). In describing what happened in the upper room, John affirmed the incarnation with the words, *"Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper"* (John 13:3-4 RSV).

We understand this ordinance to represent his giving up his heavenly glory to become a human being, and his willingness to take the form of a servant.

Likewise, we are also called to empty ourselves and take on the role of the servant. There is an incarnational aspect of all believers as well. We believe that when a person is born again that he is filled with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. First John 4:4 says, *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (NIV).

We believe the service of footwashing reminds us of our calling to be servants.

As Christians, we are called to be servants with our servant Lord. In this ordinance we commemorate the meaning of Christian life as a life of service. Jesus made this clear in the upper room when he washed his disciples' feet. *"When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master'"* (John 13:12-16 RSV).

Speaking to disciples anxious for position and power, who equated greatness with rank and authority, Jesus said, *"Whoever would be first among you must also be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:43-45 RSV).

Paul counseled the Church, *"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than your selves....Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 2:3, 5 RSV). Having the mind of Christ Jesus is being like our Savior *"...who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant"* (Phil. 2:7 RSV).

Whatever our position in society, washing one another's feet reminds Christians of their calling to serve one another as brothers and sisters equal in Christ.

We believe this ordinance is an expression of our love for one another.

John said of Jesus in the upper room as he was about to wash his disciples' feet, *"Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (John 13:1 RSV). His own whom he loved to the end included Judas—deceiver and betrayer.

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he gave them the new commandment to *"love one another, even as I loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35 RSV). What is more essential to the life and well-being of the Church than that Christians truly love one another?

We believe this ordinance reminds us of our need to minister and to be ministered to.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. *"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come"* (Heb. 13:14 RSV). As we move toward the heavenly city, we need each other and have the privilege and responsibility to serve one another. *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2 NIV). It should be noted, however, that we need to allow others to bear our burdens. It is sometimes more difficult in the Church to allow ourselves to be ministered to than to minister.

In life we hurt and get hurt. Sometimes we fail, and other times we are victims of others' wrongdoing. We need to be forgiven and we need to forgive, to minister and be ministered to. We are called to be like Christ to each other. This ordinance reminds us of our continuing ministry as Christians, a ministry both given and received. This ordinance is a beautiful symbol of our care for one another.

We believe this ordinance helps us prepare for the Lord's supper.

The ordinance of footwashing is generally observed in conjunction with the ordinance of the Lord's supper. It can help us come to the Lord's table properly prepared, in right relationship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus tells us, *"If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember*

1392 *that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be*
1393 *reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24 RSV).*

1394 Since time is not an essential element in observing the Lord's supper, the ordinance of footwashing is
1395 effective whether or not in company with the Lord's supper. The celebration of the incarnation, the
1396 reminder that the Christian is called to be a servant, the need to express our Christian love and affection,
1397 and to minister and be ministered to—all are present whenever we observe this ordinance.

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THE LORD'S SUPPER

Communion

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We believe in the ordinance of the Lord's supper as a celebration of our redemption.

Jesus instituted the Lord's supper on the evening preceding the Crucifixion, during the Passover Feast (Luke 22:7-23). The Passover celebration commemorated the redemption of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Moses instructed the Israelites, "*Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians'*" (Ex. 12:24-27 NIV). For the Christian, the Lord's supper commemorates the redemptive act of Christ in establishing the New Covenant; Jesus transformed the Passover meal into a memorial meal of himself for believers. Jesus was, as John the Baptizer said, "...*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29 NIV).

We believe this ordinance is intended to remind us of Christ's atoning death.

The Lord's supper is recorded in three gospels (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). These passages reveal that the broken bread represents the body of Christ given for us. The cup passed among the disciples symbolizes the blood Jesus shed for the sins of mankind. "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness...*" (Heb. 9:22 NIV). In receiving the bread and the cup, Christians remember that because Christ died they receive forgiveness for sin.

The Lord's supper is also an act of obedience and worship of Christ. The Apostle Paul recalled Jesus' words, "*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11:24-25 NIV).

But participating in the Lord's supper is more than just an activity in which we remember Christ's sacrifice; it also points us to the future when he will return. "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26 NIV). Therefore, it is also a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

We believe the Lord's supper is a proclamation of hope.

Christians believe that Christ will return for his followers, the Church (1 Thess. 4:16-18). In receiving the bread and the cup of the Lord's supper, the people of God testify that they "*wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good*" (Titus 2:13-14 NIV).

We believe the Lord's supper is open to all Christians.

To participate in this ordinance one must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Anyone who confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord is eligible and invited to participate, regardless of church membership. Therefore, there are also no age requirements for participation. Participation by youth and children is left to the discretion of parents. And while participation is celebratory, the Lord's supper should always be observed "*in a fitting and orderly way*" (1 Cor. 14:40 NIV).

The Bible clearly counsels that participation in the Lord's supper should come only after serious self-examination. "*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup*" (1 Cor. 11:28 NIV). The concerns of self-examination include being truly committed to Jesus Christ, being conscious of what he did on the cross, and having a loving regard for his Body, the Church (1 Cor. 11:17-32).

The frequency of observance of the Lord's supper is left to the discretion of the local church, but whenever the ordinance is celebrated it is a unifying act of the Body of Christ both locally and worldwide.

THE PRESENTATION OF CHILDREN FOR THE LORD'S BLESSING

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We believe children are a gift of God.

We read in Genesis 33:5, "Esau looked up and saw the women and children. 'Who are these with you?' he asked. Jacob answered, 'They are the children God has graciously given your servant'" (NIV). The great judge and prophet Samuel was dedicated to the Lord even before birth. After Samuel had been weaned, Hannah said, "I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:27-28 NIV).

We believe children are a part of the community of faith.

Children born to parents who are in the household of faith experience God's love through the care and loving concern of their Christian parents and the Church. This act of dedication recognizes their participation in the life of the family of God. Child dedication is not a sacrament nor is it a declaration of a child's faith. We believe in the implied biblical teaching of an age when people mature enough to grasp a faith decision on their own. That age may be different for each child. In the death of a person before that age, we believe that person goes to heaven. The same principle applies to the situation of developmentally disabled (Rom. 5 and Matt. 18: 1-9).

We believe parents are responsible for the spiritual nurture of their children.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6 NIV). The New Testament directs parents to raise their children with Christian discipline and instruction (Eph. 6:4). Throughout the Scriptures God's people are urged to teach and nurture children by word and example. "Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deut. 4:9 NIV; see also Deut. 6:5-7). In this service parents dedicate themselves as well as their child by publicly declaring a commitment to raise their child according to God's plan.

We believe the congregation is responsible for the spiritual nurture of children presented for the Lord's blessing.

As children need warm relationships in their families, so they need warm relationships in the family of God. Such nurture is needed for both parents and children. This calls for a variety of educational opportunities and constant encouragement. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another as a fellowship of God's people" (Heb. 10:25 NIV). Members of the congregation serve as models for parents and children, demonstrating what it means to be a Christian. In this service, the Church dedicates herself as well as the parents in publicly declaring a commitment to help the parents raise their child according to God's plan.

We believe we ought to follow Jesus in ministering to children.

"Little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Matt. 19:13-14 NIV). Jesus showed deep appreciation and concern for children. So should the Church.

We believe in the presentation of children for the Lord's blessing.

In this service, children are set apart for the Lord. The congregation joins with the parents in pledging themselves to nurture those children in faith in Christ.

Comment [L29]: Are you talking about a practice or a church service where the act of dedication is recognized?

Comment [L30]: Is the emphasis of this Scripture on parental responsibility? It could be deleted altogether.

Comment [L31]: Suggest replacing this with: In presenting their child for the Lord's blessing,

Comment [L32]: Similar to comments above: is this a service or an act of presenting children for the Lord's blessing?

Comment [L33]: Perhaps it could say: The general practice of the Churches of God is to present children for the Lord's blessing during a worship service. In this service,...

GLOBAL MISSION

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We believe God is the author of mission.

Mission is about “being sent.” It is not something the Church initiates but what God does by his Spirit in the world and through his people (Acts 1:4-8, 11:12-18; Eph. 2:19-22). He is the God of mission who has always been at work revealing himself in the world. “*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them*” (Rom. 1:19; see also Acts 14:17, 17:24-27).

From the calling of Abram and his descendants to be a blessing to the nations, God chooses people through whom he blesses others “...and all peoples will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). All of Scripture declares God’s heart for the nations (Ex. 9:16; 1 Chr. 16:23-24; Ps. 57:5-11, 67:1-2, 96:1-3; Isa. 45:22, 49:6, 60:1-3; Dan. 7:13-14; Ezek. 36:22-23; Mal. 1:11; Matt. 24:14; Mark 11:17; Luke 23:47; John 3:16-17; Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 1:5, 15:8-12; 1 Tim. 2:4-6).

Comment [L34]: No translations are specified throughout this entire section.

We believe the Church responds to God’s mission both locally and globally.

Jesus commanded his followers to “...make disciples of all nations...” (Matt. 28:19). He further amplified that agenda by adding, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Church was then birthed at Jerusalem (Acts 2), but soon spread to Judea (Acts 8:1, 9:31), Samaria (Acts 8:4-25) and the ends of the earth (Rom. 1:5-8, 15:17-20). The Church is called to address these geographical and cultural challenges—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth—simultaneously, not sequentially.

God empowered the early disciples so that they could effectively serve as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection with a message that “...repentance and forgiveness of sins...” (Luke 24:46-49) would be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. We are called to be “on mission” wherever we are as his representatives of the Kingdom with a message of good news that “...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Jesus said his followers were to be the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13-16). We witness for Christ by our words and actions as evidence of the indwelling Christ living and working through us (Phil. 2:15; Col. 3:17).

We believe every Christian and every church in every nation is called to participate in the task of making disciples.

All the people of God—regardless of our spiritual maturity or our ministry roles—have the responsibility to be “...Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). We are sent into the world with the same mandate expressed by Jesus, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Amazingly, despite our obvious limitations, God has chosen to work through the Church—which is made for mission. Paul writes that through Jesus, we (the Church) “...have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom. 1:5). The Holy Spirit is the Church’s enabling power to be his witness in the world (Acts 1:8). The mission of the Church is to actively participate as God’s people in what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world for the redemption of his creation, which includes providing the opportunity for everyone to confess Jesus Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:8-17).

We believe we witness to God’s mission through a holistic ministry.

Our missions express the Church’s participation in the mission of God. He is concerned with every human need (Isa. 58:5-7; Amos 5:21-24; Matt. 25:31-45; James 1:27, 2:14-17; 1 John 3:17-18). At the outset of his ministry, Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

God expands his mission through a variety of measures, such as the proclamation of God’s Word (Acts 2:41, 47, 8:4, 12-13, 11:19-24, 13:44-49, 14:1, 21, 16:11-15, 30-34, 17:1-4, 11-12, 30-34); through compassionate ministries (Acts 5:12-16, 9:32-43); through gifts of leadership and service (Acts 6:1-7); through obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26-39, 10:17-48, 16:6-10); through prayer (Acts 1:12-14, 4:23-31, 13:3; Col. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1-2); through the sending and supporting of missionaries (Acts 13:1-4; Phil. 4:10-20; 3 John 5-8); and through the planting of new churches (Acts 13:1, 14:21-23, 15:36, 41, 16:4-5, 18:8-11, 22-23, 20:17; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Rev. 2:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2:8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14).

Comment [L35]: How is this word meant in this context? Do we have multiple missions, but God only has one? Shouldn’t our mission be the same as his? Or does the term refer to specific programs of the Church? Would it be better to use the word “ministries” or “ministry”?

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We believe the ultimate goal of the Church's mission is to glorify God.

From a human standpoint, evangelism and missions are often motivated by a love for people who are not yet Christ's followers. To enter eternity without Christ is to miss heaven. But from a God-centered perspective, a higher motivation for missions is to see more glory given to God. Paul wrote, "*Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy*" (Rom. 15:8-9).

Jesus understood that he would be sacrificed on a cross—not just for the sake of lost humankind, but for the sake of God's glory. He prayed at Gethsemane "...it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27-28). Revelation paints a picture of a great multitude of worshippers representing every nation, tribe, people and language gathered around the throne of God praising him for salvation (Rev. 7:9-10). At that point, both his mission and ours come to an end.

Comment [L36]: Again, there is a different usage of the word "mission" throughout this section. Is the word used to describe ministry or purpose?

Comment [L37]: Maybe "outreach (or ministry) could be used for those outside of faith in Christ" throughout this section, when talking about acts of service rather than purpose.

DRAFT

LAST THINGS

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We believe there is a continuity to history.

We believe that history extending into eternity past and future has and will unfold according to God's timetable, established by him alone before the foundations of the world. He has a definite purpose in all things as demonstrated by creation itself and his periodic intervention into the affairs of his people and mankind in general. These great and mighty saving acts, wherein he has demonstrated his desire to reconcile sinful mankind unto himself, will proceed to the ultimate victory of Christ over sin, death and Satan (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

We believe Jesus will return.

Just as at his first advent Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, we believe Jesus will come again as promised in the Scriptures (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Titus 2:13).

We believe in the resurrection of the dead.

We believe the bodies of the dead in Christ will be resurrected and changed to glorified bodies like unto his. These new glorified bodies will then be reunited with their souls, already in the presence of the Lord, to spend eternity in the place he has prepared for them (Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; Rev. 20:4-7; John 14:1-6).

We believe the bodies of the unbelievers will also be resurrected to be joined with their souls to face the judgment for their rejection of Christ as Savior (Rev. 20:11-15).

We believe in the judgment of God.

We believe the saved will stand before the judgment of Christ to give account for their works done for him (2 Cor. 5:10). It is there they will receive crowns for lives pleasing to him (Heb. 6:10). We believe the judgment of the believer's sin was taken by Christ on Calvary and has been forgiven and purged from the memory of God (Heb. 10:17).

We believe those who have rejected God's offer of salvation and have not received Christ as their Savior will stand before the great white throne judgment. Their names will not be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. They will suffer the eternal consequence of that rejection and their sin (Rev. 20:11, 15).

We believe in the ultimate glorification of all believers.

We believe that earthly, corruptible things cannot enter heaven (1 Cor. 15:50). We believe we will, therefore, come to total sanctification, perfection and glorification when we enter his presence (1 John 3:2; 2 Cor. 5:1; Rom. 8:30).

We believe the sequence of last events is not essential to salvation.

We believe that individual understanding of how the events of last things will unfold has no impact upon the way to salvation or the work of Christ on the cross. We believe there are honest differing understandings regarding last things. We believe godly and learned scholars have arrived at differing and biblically supported understandings concerning the details of when and how last things will unfold. Accordingly, the Churches of God, General Conference has no established or universally accepted dogma concerning the timetable, nature or sequence of these events. Individuals holding a wide spectrum of positions may be found within the Churches of God. All are expected to respect and show acceptance of others, whatever position they may hold. Further all are encouraged to prayerfully search the Scriptures and determine an individual position they can biblically defend. Individual differences regarding these matters should not be a catalyst for division in the body or a hindrance to the work of the Gospel.

We believe there are honest differing understandings regarding details of how last things will unfold.

We believe God continues to reveal himself and still desires to reconcile man to himself. Though changeless in his nature, he remains relevant in an ever-changing world. Until the ultimate victory is complete and eternity begins, the call and commission of Christ to all believers is to send forth the light of the Gospel into a world of darkness. We need not know all the details of the future to be faithful to that call. We do need to do all possible to use changing methods to reach this changing world with the changeless message of God's love.

Comment [L38]: This is a church phrase. How about: "We believe that, for those who have died believing in Jesus Christ as Savior, their bodies will be..."

Comment [L39]: 1st or 2nd Thess?

Comment [L40]: Is this a separate sub-heading? Couldn't it be a second paragraph under "We believe in the resurrection of the dead"?

Comment [L41]: Church phrase again. How about: "We believe that those who have trusted God for salvation will stand..."

Comment [L42]: This seems to be a reiteration of the second sentence in the above sub-section and not tied to the substance of the following paragraph. Should it rather have a sub-heading something like, "We believe in the continuing revelation of an unchanging God to an ever-changing world."