The Pastor's Call
Readiness for Ministry

The Pastor's Development
CGGC Ministerial Credential Standards

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FOREWORD

In June 1998 the General Conference in session adopted an updated standard for ministerial credentials. This standard was drafted after input was provided by representatives from the several conferences through Consultation.

As this was done, the question in everyone’s mind was: “What constitutes ministerial readiness? When is a man or woman prepared for ministry?”

Maturity in ministerial readiness is not easy to define. Consequently, each of the five areas consists of several key themes which further clarify the scope of the area. While the profile describes an ideal candidate for ministry, we would agree that no person would likely excel on every point. Thus, it is hoped that the profile will be used as a set of guidelines rather than a new legalism. At the same time, the document reflects the result of spirit-led discussion. Thus, if the profile should not be taken literally, it should be taken seriously by both the candidate and the various credentialing bodies.

The profile may also be useful to pastors currently involved in ministry. As the introduction points out, current pastors may want to reflect on and evaluate their own ministry in light of the several areas mentioned in the profile.

We trust that this Readiness for Ministry profile will be helpful in providing the church with mature, spirit-filled pastors.

READINESS FOR MINISTRY

The CGGC believes that God calls men and women to serve the church as pastors. This personal call is an essential requirement for anyone seeking ministerial credentials in the Churches of God.

The call by itself, however, is not enough. It must be followed by preparation and it must be confirmed by the church. The process of preparation and confirmation is taught by Scripture. For example, when Jesus called the twelve, He led them through an intensive period of training that lasted three years. The early church ordained elders by the laying on of hands, a practice which by its very nature indicated that the call required confirmation. Paul instructed Timothy that an elder “must not be a recent convert” (I Timothy 3:6 NIV), and warned him, “do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (I Timothy 5:22 NIV). The church has a biblical mandate to measure the readiness for ministry of any person professing to have received God’s call and seeking credentials for pastoral ministry.
PREPARATION for ministry should be guided by the proper commission of the regional conference that will confer credentials. When a person senses a call and is ready to begin thinking seriously about the ministry, that person should meet with the appropriate commission. A long-term relationship is established, and the applicant is said to be “under the care” of the commission. Close communication between the applicant and the commission should be maintained throughout the preparation process.

CONFIRMATION should be thought of as a process rather than a single action, and it should never be treated as an automatic result of the preparation process. As the applicant nears the completion of academic requirements, the commission that has the applicant under its care should begin the formal process of final evaluation to determine if the applicant is truly ready for service in the pastoral ministry. If approved by the commission, confirmation will come with the vote of the regional conference and the conferring of licensing credentials.

After at least one year of pastoring, ordinand will be evaluated and possibly conferred.

READINESS FOR MINISTRY is a key issue in both preparation and confirmation. When is a man or woman ready for ministry? It is helpful to think of readiness in terms of several basic dimensions of human experience:

**Spiritual Readiness:** The applicant is a mature believer in Jesus Christ.

**Intellectual Readiness:** The applicant has the necessary knowledge to function in the pastoral ministry.

**Professional Readiness:** The applicant has the skill needed to carry out pastoral duties in the local church.

**Emotional Readiness:** The applicant is emotionally mature.

**Personal Readiness:** The applicant’s personal life is free of conflicts that may interfere with his or her effectiveness as a pastor.

A person is ready for ministry when readiness in these areas is integrated into readiness as a whole person for the pastoral calling.

The list that follows is a detailed profile of a person who is ready for ministry. It amplifies and clarifies the general description above. The profile should be used in different ways at various points in the preparation and confirmation process.
USES OF THE PROFILE

1. APPLICATION

When a person meets with the proper commission to begin the process, the applicant should be given a copy of the profile and the commission should review it with the applicant. The profile will help the applicant know what is expected of him or her and will also help focus the preparation process.

2. PREPARATION

The caring commission should be monitoring and evaluating the applicant throughout the preparation process. The profile can be used as a constant reference point in this ongoing evaluation. If problems are noted they can be addressed and steps taken to correct them. In this stage, the profile should be used as a diagnostic tool, rather than as a measure of final readiness.

3. CONFIRMATION

The profile should be the foundation for the confirmation process. Some sections of the profile may be addressed directly with such methods as written examinations and formal interviews. Other sections will depend more on the judgment of those who have known the applicant through the preparation process. In some cases, special methods may be needed (for example, outside counseling or personality testing). It should be remembered that all pastors differ in their strengths and weaknesses. The profile describes an ideal candidate for ministry. No applicant will match it exactly. Serious deficiencies may mean that credentials should be delayed or even denied. In other cases, an applicant may be weak in certain areas, but able to function on a minimum level for ministry. In the end, the decision regarding credentials will rest not on a checklist of specific characteristics, but on the measure of the applicant as a whole person.

4. CONTINUING EDUCATION

It is not true that if someone is ready for ministry today that they will still be ready for ministry two or five or ten years in the future. A pastor must make a continuing effort to remain ready for the challenges of the pastoral vocation. Persons who have received their credentials will find the profile a helpful guide for periodic self-examination. Used in this way it will point out areas where further learning, growth or renewal is needed. The profile is comprehensive enough that it will provide goals for improvement throughout one’s ministry.

A final use of the profile should be noted. It will prove helpful in planning curricula and courses of study designed to prepare persons for the pastoral ministry.
THE PROFILE

The person who is ready for ministry:

SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. Confesses faith in Jesus Christ.
   A. Has made a decision of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
   B. Is able to describe and reflect on his or her personal journey of faith and gives evidence of a changed life through Christ.
   C. Is not a recent convert.
   D. Has been baptized as a believer and participates in the Lord’s Supper and Feetwashing.

2. Is committed to discipleship in his or her own life.

   A. Maintains a regular schedule for private prayer.
   B. Enriches his or her spiritual life with a variety of devotional materials.
   C. Maintains a regular schedule for reading and reflecting on the Bible devotionally.

4. Maintains a mutual support relationship with a community of faith.

5. Recognizes and utilizes personal spiritual gifts.

6. Manifests continuing growth and transformation through Christ in all dimensions of his or her life.

THE CALL

7. Demonstrates a genuine call to the pastoral ministry.
   A. Is able to describe the process by which he or she became aware of the call and the reasons for believing it to be a divine call to the pastoral ministry.
   B. Is confident that he or she is sensing a call out of a sincere desire to serve God rather than ulterior motives (such as a desire to please others, a need to compensate for feelings of guilt, or the mistaken notion that ministry will be an easy occupation).
   C. Has “counted the cost,” has a realistic expectation of what the pastoral ministry will be like and is prepared to make the sacrifices and commitments that may be
required.

8. Has a call that is confirmed by others.

A. If married, is supported by his or her spouse in the decision to enter the pastoral ministry.

B. Is supported by his or her pastor, who recognizes the candidate’s call and sees his or her potential for effective pastoral service.

C. Has shown qualities of leadership in his or her local church as well as in other situations.

D. Is supported by his or her local church and local regional conference.

PERSONALITY AND EMOTIONS

9. Is committed to becoming a whole person as defined by Scripture and shows evidence of that commitment in his or her life.

A. Demonstrates the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in his or her attitudes and behavior, specifically: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

B. Is able to recognize areas of his or her life that are still subject to the carnal nature and is working on surrendering those areas fully to the authority of Jesus (see Galatians 5:16-21; Colossians 3:5-10).

C. Recognizes Jesus Christ as the model and example of a complete human person and regards faith in and faithfulness to Christ as the primary conditions for inner healing and personal wholeness.

10. Demonstrates the marks of emotional maturity.

A. Accepts responsibility for his or her own actions.

B. Can be depended on to keep commitments and honor deadlines.

C. Is able to work on long-term goals without immediate gratification.

D. Is able to express his or her needs and feelings in direct and non-aggressive ways.

E. Is able to deal with disappointment without becoming discouraged and giving up.

11. Is able to manage anger in appropriate ways.

A. Is able to receive criticism graciously and with an open mind.

B. Is able to deal with angry persons in loving and constructive ways.
C. Is willing to accept counsel from others.

D. Is willing to accept direction from and cooperate with persons in authority over him or her.

E. Is able to resolve his or her own anger in constructive, non-aggressive ways.

12. **Demonstrates a positive self-image.**

A. Is able to articulate a realistic assessment of his or her strengths and weaknesses.

B. Is able to relate socially to other persons.

C. Is able to maintain long-term loving relationships with significant friends and members of his or her immediate family.

D. Is able to express affection in appropriate ways.

E. Is able to express feelings of love, admiration or praise to other persons without embarrassment.

F. Is able to receive praise and affirmation graciously.

G. Is not hindered or controlled by compulsive or obsessive behavior in ways that would interfere with ministry.

H. Is able to work and relate to others without the need for constant approval.

I. Is able to express disagreement or differences of opinion without apologizing or becoming belligerent.

13. **Knows his or her limits.**

A. Recognizes limits to his or her knowledge and ability.

B. Knows how to recognize when he or she is overstressed and knows how to cope with stress.

C. Is able to identify areas where he or she needs to grow.

D. Demonstrates a teachable spirit.

14. **Is able to serve as well as lead.**

A. Recognizes ways in which he or she may be tempted to abuse the authority of the pastoral office.

B. Is willing to protect and care for persons who are emotionally weak and vulnerable.
C. Sees the need for accountability and is willing to be accountable to the local church, regional conference and General Conference.

D. Understands that he or she will be expected to be an example to the people he or she will serve and accepts this without resentment.

E. Is able to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' example in washing the feet of the disciples and is able to describe what this example means for his or her personal life and vocation.

F. Is able to serve others graciously (protecting the dignity of those served), discreetly (without notice by others), quietly (without pomp), and cheerfully (without complaint).

**PERSONAL MATTERS**

15. **Understands and is committed to the biblical standard of sexual morality.**

A. Has a healthy, positive attitude toward his or her own sexuality and, if married, is able to enjoy a fulfilling sexual relationship with his or her spouse.

B. Is committed to chastity outside of marriage.

C. Knows the power of sexual feelings and does not underestimate his or her vulnerability to temptation.

D. Is able to relate to persons of the opposite sex as persons rather than as objects of sexual desire.

E. Regards homosexual relations as a sin. If aware of homosexual tendencies in himself or herself, the candidate will abstain from active homosexual relations and seek appropriate counseling.

16. **Is able to be faithful to his or her family.**

A. If married, values his or her marriage as the most important human relationship in his or her life and actively nurtures and cultivates it.

B. Has realistic expectations of the pressures that will be placed on his or her marriage and family by the pastoral ministry.

C. Is willing to set limits on work in order to be a faithful parent and marriage partner.

C. Is willing to protect the privacy and personal lives of his or her children.
17. Is physically able to perform the duties of the pastoral ministry.

A. Abstains from tobacco, alcoholic beverages and illegal drugs.

B. Does not abuse and is not dependent on chemical substances of any kind.

C. Practices moderation and good nutrition in his or her diet.

D. Receives regular physical checkups.

E. Values physical fitness and plans for regular physical exercise.

F. Understands the need to balance work, recreation and rest.

18. Is a good manager of his or her own finances.

A. Demonstrates a spirit of contentment that does not depend on material possessions.

B. Is able to live within his or her means.

C. Knows that mismanagement of personal finances will damage his or her effectiveness for ministry.

D. Does not become indebted at levels he or she cannot manage and uses credit and credit cards with caution.

E. Will not raise the issue of compensation outside the channels established for that purpose.

F. Will not borrow money from nor enter into business partnerships with members of his or her congregation.

G. Practices good judgment in accepting gifts of cash or goods, and will return gifts that may compromise his or her integrity.

H. Pays all taxes as required by law, unless Christian conscience prohibits.

I. Realizes that pastoral compensation is a matter of public record and will not attempt to conceal any part of that compensation.

J. Will avoid handling any money received by the church and will never handle church monies without witnesses or proper record of the transaction involved.

K. Will not use church accounts for his or her personal purchases in order to avoid paying taxes.

19. Has a good reputation in the community outside the church and is involved in
community affairs.

20. Is not prone to gossip and can keep confidences.

DOCTRINE AND ACADEMIC PREPARATION

21. Has completed an approved program of preparation for pastoral ministry under the care of the appropriate committee or commission.

22. Is able to explain and reflect on the basic dogmas of the Christian faith, including but not limited to:

   - Creation
   - Revelation
   - God
     - A. The idea of God
     - B. The Trinity
     - C. The Father
     - D. The Son
     - E. The Holy Spirit
   - Incarnation
   - Atonement/Salvation
   - Resurrection/Second Coming
   - The Church

23. Is familiar with the current official statement of the doctrines of the Churches of God and is able to explain and reflect on those doctrines, especially those that are emphasized by the Churches of God including:

   - The Church of God
   - The New Birth
   - The Ordinances
   - Presbyterial Polity
   - Sanctification
   - Free Moral Agency

24. Is familiar with the broad outline of Christian history, including non-western and non-Protestant expressions of Christianity, and is able to interpret the story of the Churches of God in the wider context of Protestantism and American Evangelicalism.

25. Is familiar with the history of the Churches of God, including the life and teachings of John Winebrenner and the development of Churches of God doctrine and tradition.

26. Is able and willing to teach, defend and promote the doctrine of the Churches of God as described in the current official doctrinal statement.
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

27. Is able to be a leader.
   A. Is able to envision what the church can become under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is able to bring that vision to reality.
   B. Is able to plan work to meet long-range goals and is able to deal with immediate details and concerns without losing sight of those goals.
   C. Is able to lead the church he or she pastors in developing goals, objectives and strategies for the future.

28. Is able to conceive, research, prepare and deliver original, biblically sound sermons that speak to real human needs and hold the interest of his audience.

29. Has a vision for and supports the total responsibility of the church in developing mature Disciples of Christ.
   A. Is able to give leadership to developing and implementing the education ministry of the church.
   B. Is a competent teacher who is able to help people apply the biblical message to their lives.
   C. Is able to develop and lead special classes and courses in the local church, including Bible studies, membership classes, workshops and elective Sunday school classes.
   D. Is able to prepare for and lead small group discussions.
   E. Understands the importance of evaluation, planning and goal setting in the Christian Education program of the church and is able to guide the church in doing them.
   F. Understands methods for recruiting, training and supporting teachers and is able to practice these in the local church.
   G. Has a basic understanding of developmental tasks, readiness for learning and persistent life concerns.
   H. Is able to describe his or her theology of Christian Education.

30. Is a competent counselor.
   A. Is able to explain his or her preferred method of counseling.
   B. Understands the principle of confidentiality and practices it.
C. Understands and practices good listening skills.

D. Understands the grief process and is prepared to support persons experiencing it.

E. Understands the purpose of, is familiar with resources for, and is able to provide premarital counseling.

F. Understands transference and protection, is aware of the dangers involved, and is able to cope with them.

G. Recognizes the limits of his or her counseling skills and knows when and where to make referrals.

H. Is aware of the legal issues involved in pastoral care and knows how to protect himself or herself, and the church, from accusations of malpractice.

31. Is able to lead his or her people in effective stewardship.

A. Practices good stewardship in his or her financial support for the church he or she serves.

B. Understands and is able to explain the biblical principle of whole-life stewardship.

C. Understands and is able to explain biblical teachings on material possessions.

D. Understands and is able to explain biblical guidelines for the financial operations of the local church.

E. Understands the importance of the church budget and is able to help his or her church develop and administer effective budgets.

F. Understands the ethical guidelines regarding charitable donations and full financial accountability and is able and willing to lead his or her church in practicing such guidelines.

G. Is able to develop and carry out a continuing program of stewardship education.

H. Is familiar with the budgets of both the regional conference and the General Conference and is able to interpret them to the congregation that her or she pastors.
32. Is able to lead the church in worship.

A. Understands the church year, recognizes its value for education and continuity, and is able to use it in ways that are appropriate for the culture and traditions of the local church.

B. Is able to plan and lead a unified order of worship that integrates music, written resources, Scripture lessons and sermons around a common theme.

C. Is able to speak, pray and read Scripture in public with a clear, natural voice and practices standard grammar and diction.

D. Understands the special emphasis placed by the Churches of God on worship as the gathering of the community of faith around the Lord’s Table and the Word of God.

E. Is able to prepare and lead a funeral, wedding and the presentation of infants for the Lord’s blessing.

F. Is able to prepare and lead services for the observance of the ordinances.

33. Is a competent administrator.

A. Is familiar with principles of time management and is able to manage his or her time effectively.

B. Is able to be responsible for the keeping of accurate parish records.

C. Is able to prepare an agenda and preside at meetings.

D. Understands the importance of long-range planning and is able to develop such plans and maintain a church calendar.

E. Understands the importance of delegation, is familiar with methods for delegation, and is able and willing to practice such methods in the local church.

F. Is familiar with and able to use various forms related to church administration, including transfers, withdrawals, and certificates of marriage, baptism, membership and presentation of children for the Lord’s blessing.

G. Is able to write effective letters, memos, reports and other communications in clear, standard English.

34. Is able to build a sense of community in the local church.

A. Understands the concept of the church as the family of God and is able to teach
this concept to his or her people.

B. Is able to model Christian love and fellowship in his or her relationships with people in the local church.

C. Demonstrates an attitude of caring and is able to cultivate that attitude in the local church.

D. Is familiar with resources for developing a sense of community in the local church.

E. Is able to teach and demonstrate good conflict resolution skills.

35. Has a vision for church growth.

A. Is familiar with the insights, research and principles of the church growth movement and is able to explain and apply them in his or her church.

B. Understands the difference between maintenance ministry and growth ministry.

C. Understands the importance of small groups for church growth and is able to develop small groups in his or her church.

D. Is able to develop plans and programs for welcoming and assimilating new people.

E. Is able to cope with resistance to church growth in ways that will not make people feet threatened or defensive.

F. Understands the importance of friendship evangelism, bridges and networks in reaching and cultivating prospects.

G. Is able to describe his or her philosophy of evangelism and outreach.

H. Is able to lead individuals to a decision of faith in Jesus Christ.

I. Is able to teach others how to be effective witnesses for Christ.

36. Is able to lead the church in understanding and accepting the mission of the church to the global community.

A. Is able to interpret and build support for the trans-cultural missions of the Churches of God.

B. Is able to help his or her people understand the biblical principle of love, justice, and responsibility for their neighbor as a foundation for Christian social responsibility.
C. Is able to lead his or her people in understanding and practicing faithful stewardship of God’s creation.

37. Is willing to take advantage of opportunities for continuing education.

LOYALTY TO THE CHURCHES OF GOD

38. Is a member in good standing of a local congregation of the Churches of God.

39. Is familiar with and supportive of the ministries and of the Churches of God on both the regional conference and General Conference levels.

40. Is familiar with the polity of the Churches of God and is willing to be subject to the authority of the regional conference and the General Conference.

41. Considers service to the regional conference and General Conference to be an extension of his or her ministry to the local church.

42. Participates in regional conference and General Conference projects and programs.

43. Is willing to surrender immediately any ministerial credentials issued by the Churches of God when ordered to do so by the regional conference or the General Conference.

44. Is willing and able to file annual statistical reports and provide other information required by the regional conference or General Conference and to comply with stated formats and deadlines.

45. Will accept and participate in a relationship with a mentor assigned by the regional conference.
STANDARDS FOR MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS
Churches of God, General Conference
700 East Melrose, P.O. Box 926
Findlay, OH 45839

Originally adopted in 1989; Revised by the 49th Session in 1998
And by the 53rd Session in 2010

GENERAL CONFERENCE STANDARDS FOR MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS

The Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) recognizes three (3) credentials for ministry subject to the laws of the state wherein they are held and subject to Internal Revenue Service regulations:

1. Ordination
2. Annual License
3. Provisional License

ALL CREDENTIALS

Every person approved and/or credentialed for ministry in the CGGC needs to:

1. Be a believer in and a disciple of Jesus Christ.
2. Have been baptized as a believer and participate in the Lord's Supper and Feetwashing.
3. Have received God's call to the area of ministry for which credentials will be granted.
4. Demonstrate the presence of the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit needed for ministry.
5. Demonstrate preparedness for ministry appropriate to the credentials being issued as defined by the CGGC Readiness for Ministry document.
6. Be a member of a local CGGC congregation. In the case of a church planter, missionary candidate, or other exceptional circumstance a credential may be issued subject to joining the CGGC through a local conference or congregation of the CGGC.
7. Cooperate with and be subject to the authority and standards of the local conference/eldership and General Conference of the CGGC. Failure to cooperate with and be subject to the local conference/eldership or the General Conference may result in the recall of credentials following due process.
8. Acknowledge the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice and demonstrate compatibility with the teachings and practices of the CGGC.
9. Evidence a teachable spirit in all things.
ORDINATION

Ordination is the standard credential for ministry in the Churches of God, General Conference. It signifies that the person is fully qualified and authorized to perform all pastoral duties and offices. It is valid for the lifetime of the ordained person unless surrendered or recalled following due process by the conference/eldership in which ordination is held.

1. Every person ordained by the Churches of God must:

   A. Have been a member of a local CGGC congregation for at least three (3) years immediately prior to ordination.

   B. Have completed an approved course of academic preparation as described below, including courses on CGGC polity, history and doctrine.

   C. Be available for appointment, by the conference/eldership conferring ordination, to a full-time assignment as a pastor or be placed full time in another ministry approved by the conferring conference/eldership. An exception to this requirement may be granted by the conferring conference/eldership in order to meet special needs (such as a tentmaker ministry in a mission church or lack of full-time positions).

   D. Have on file with the sponsoring commission a letter of recommendation from the local church in which membership is held.

   E. Have been recommended for ordination by the appropriate commission of the conferring conference/eldership.

   F. Have been approved for ordination by the conferring conference/eldership and ordained under the authority of that body in a special service provided for that purpose.

   G. Have completed at least one year of satisfactory ministry experience as determined by the appropriate commission of the conferring conference/eldership under the guidance of an assigned mentor/s.

2. The preferred academic preparation for ordination for persons of all ages is a Bachelor's degree from an undergraduate institution and a Master's degree from a seminary approved by the sponsoring commission of the local conference/eldership, preferably Winebrenner Theological Seminary. This educational program shall be carried out under the care of the appropriate sponsoring commission of a local conference/eldership.

3. A person who is unable to complete the preferred academic preparation described in section two (2), but who fulfills all other requirements for ordination, may petition the local conference/eldership for permission to follow an alternative educational route. If approved a person may be ordained if:

   1 "Full-time" means "working in the pastoral ministry as one's only employment and career." Further definition of this term is left to each local conference/eldership.
A. The candidate is at least thirty (30) years old or has served five (5) years of satisfactory ministry and has completed one of the following courses of academic preparation under the care of the appropriate committee or commission of the conferring conference/eldership.

- A course of studies from Winebrenner Theological Seminary or another accredited educational institution as approved by the appropriate commission of the conferring conference/eldership.

- A Ministerial Training Course approved by the General Conference

- A Bachelor's degree with a pre-ministerial major at a Bible college or Christian liberal arts college approved by the conferring conference/eldership, provided additional courses on Churches of God polity, doctrine and history have been completed.  

A person may enter one of these alternate routes only if:

1.) The candidate has demonstrated special reasons for not being able to complete the preferred academic requirements.

2.) The candidate has requested and received permission to enter one of these alternate routes by the sponsoring commission of the local conference/eldership.

3.) The candidate is at least twenty-five (25) years old at the time of entrance.

B. The candidate has entered the fellowship of the Churches of God from another recognized Christian body, holds a valid ordination from that body, has completed courses on Churches of God polity, history and doctrine, is in agreement with the teaching and practices of the Churches of God, has been a member of a local congregation of the Churches of God for three (3) years, has served under the care of the appropriate committee or commission of the local conference/eldership for an interim period of three (3) years, and has been recommended by the proper committee or commission and approved by the conferring conference/eldership.

2 In order to help commissions determine whether or not a particular institution should be approved, that institution's pre-ministerial major should be measured against the following outline of essential courses:

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<tr>
<th>Bible (7 courses) Pastoral Ministry Practices</th>
<th>Evangelism/Church Growth</th>
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<td>Old Testament - 3</td>
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<td>Spiritual Formation</td>
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<td>Homiletics (2 courses)</td>
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It is the responsibility of the appropriate committee or commission to see that the standards for ordination of the original body are in sufficient agreement with the standards of the General Conference to allow ordination to be recognized during the interim period. This recognition is temporary (for the purpose of providing ministry during the interim period), but all non-Churches of God credentials must be returned to the conferring bodies before he or she can be ordained in the Churches of God. The conferences/elderships of the General Conference are not obligated to recognize any credentials issued by another body.

It should be understood that in receiving a pastor for ministry under non-Churches of God credentials for a three (3) year interim period, no guarantee is made that ordination in the Churches of God will be conferred at the end of that period.

C. The candidate has served satisfactorily as a pastor in the Churches of God for not less than twenty (20) years, has reached the age of fifty-five (55) years, and is recommended by the appropriate committee or commission and approved by the conferring conference/eldership.

4. Ordained ministers of the Churches of God shall be in one of three (3) categories of ministerial service:

A. Active
Serving or available for service full time in a pastoral charge under appointment by a conference/eldership of the Churches of God or serving full time in a ministry approved by the conference/eldership where credentials are held. An ordained person who has been available for, but unassigned to, full time ministry for a period of five (5) years may be moved from active to inactive status by a vote of the conference/eldership in session.

B. Inactive
Not serving in a ministry appointed or approved by the local conference/eldership and placed on inactive status by a vote of the conference/eldership in session. An ordained minister can hold this status for no more than five (5) years without special approval by the conference/eldership in which ordination is currently held; if approval is not given ordination will be recalled.

C. Retired
Officially certified as disabled or retired by a vote of the appropriate commission or conference/eldership.

5. Ordination credentials that have been surrendered or recalled may only be reinstated by the last conference/eldership in which ordination was held, according to procedures developed by each conference/eldership. Credentials for ministry of any kind cannot be granted by any conference/eldership to any person whose ordination has been surrendered or recalled, other than by the last conference/eldership in which ordination was held, without the approval of the General Conference Administrative Council.
6. The active ordained person is required to annually complete 20 hours of continuing education as defined by their local conference/eldership.

7. The ordained person remains subject to the authority of the local conference/eldership and of the General Conference. Ordination may be recalled at any time for just cause as determined by the conference/eldership in which ordination is held.

**ANNUAL LICENSE**

The Annual License is a credential that allows persons to enter ministry who have not yet completed academic requirements for ordination but who have met all other requirements for credentials, who have been recommended by the local church in which membership is held, and who are willing to submit to the ongoing direction and care (including training and preparation) of the appropriate commission or commissions of the conferring conference/eldership.

1. Activation of an Annual License is contingent on appointment to a pastoral charge or placement in a ministry approved by the conference/eldership.

2. This credential must be renewed annually. Renewal is contingent on acceptable ministry at the place of assignment and satisfactory continuation of training and preparation under the guidance of the appropriate commission or commissions of the conferring conference/eldership.

3. The licentiate may administer the ordinances and unite persons in marriage while holding the first Annual License provided a mentor has been appointed and the licentiate has demonstrated an understanding of and the ability to perform such ministerial tasks. The sponsoring committee or commission of the conferring conference/eldership shall determine whether to grant this authority beginning with the first or any succeeding Annual License.

Each conference/eldership should provide mentors and special instruction in the area of Ordinances.

**PROVISIONAL LICENSE**

A Provisional License provides opportunity for ministry by persons who may lack formal pastoral training but who fulfill all other requirements for credentials and whose service is needed by the local conference/eldership to provide limited pastoral or ministry specific duties in their local church.

1. The candidate for Provisional License must have demonstrated effective spiritual leadership in a local church, serving as elder, deacon, etc. and have the positive recommendation of their home church and senior pastor.

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3 Rationale for this restriction:

A. Provide order and discipline in God's house.
B. Provide instruction so that the ordinances are observed properly.
C. Maintain the special significance of the ordinances.
D. To preserve continuity and consistency in the church's observance of the ordinances.
E. The ultimate concern is not control but care - the Annual License is a preparatory, in-process credential.
2. Activation of a Provisional License is contingent upon assignment to a ministerial position or placement in an approved ministry.

3. This credential is subject to review by the local conference/eldership and the local church and is contingent upon an acceptable ministry at the place of assignment.

Persons holding a Provisional License in the Churches of God shall be in one of two (2) categories of service:

**Without Privilege:** A person holding a Provisional License without privilege may administer the ordinances with proper guidance but may not unite persons in marriage or be appointed as a senior pastor.

**With Privilege:** A person holding a Provisional License with privilege is eligible for appointment as a senior pastor, may administer the ordinances and may unite persons in marriage.

To be granted privilege a person must:

Serve under the mentorship of an ordained pastor for a period not less than one year and receive the mentor’s positive recommendation after such time.

Having been granted this privilege, the licentiate must meet quarterly with their mentor and attend at least one training seminar per year.
The Pastor: A Developing Minister

LEADERSHIP

The Pastor as Administrator

For many pastors the role of administrator is a responsibility they would just as soon forget. The call to preach, teach, pastor, counsel, and administer the ordinances of the church are challenging roles within the general scope of the sacred calling. Charting organizational structure, managing a work force of people, producing publications and promotion, raising budgets, maintaining records, and analyzing community trends and parish patterns—all sound too much like business. It is hard to put religious symbols on these things or to drape them with holy tapestries.

But the pastor must be an administrator or the work of the ministry will lie like fruit sprawling at the foot of the tree—ungathered, undelivered, and wasted except for that picked up for an appetizer by a casual passerby.

The Master who fed five thousand through the miracle of the loaves and fishes did so by an organized plan. He ordered His disciples to have the people seated in companies of fifty. It was an administrative detail to help fulfill a practical and spiritual mission.

Moses’ endeavors to meet the needs of the children of Israel were observed by Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law. He saw that Moses’ personal commitment would destroy his very life and vitality, so Jethro gave counsel that Moses should search out and select men of God who could judge the people in all seasons, thereby relieving Moses for other responsibilities (Exodus 18:14-26).

The Apostle Paul called for things to be done in the Church in a decent and orderly manner. The work of the Kingdom, the ministry of God’s grace, and the care of God’s people mandate administration lest God and humanity are failed by the pastoral ministry.

The early Church was very mobile. But as it grew and ministries expanded, the necessity for deacons arose. A ministry of service was implemented. Had Paul not had an awareness of administration, the saints at Jerusalem may have been prayed for but no offering would have been received to relieve their suffering. Had Paul not answered his mail, some of the New Testament books would not exist.

Administration means that the pastor has a holy sense of what the Church is all about. The pastor is primarily responsible for seeing that the worship, teaching, fellowship, social concerns, and stewardship of the congregation enrich the community of faith and evangelize the alien community.
To accomplish such a task requires spiritual insight, prophetic proclamation, understanding of human dynamics, planning, developing strategy, and the molding of a plan of action. The pastor does not do all these things. One person cannot. But the spiritual dynamic which molds the diversities of gifts and talents, resources and responsibilities into one unit must be provided by the pastor. This unified will then be able to fulfill the purpose of God for that congregation.

The pastor-administrator does not dictate, but molds and directs that which belongs to another. The minister must know the organization and policies of the church being served. The pastor’s responsibility is to the board. Organizational structure may be poor, policies may be inadequate, staff may be incompetent and the real purpose of ministry may be misdirected. The task of the pastor-administration is to motivate, raise expectations, suggest strategies, recruit and train persons, and assist in policy development so that the purpose is clearly understood and ministry is efficient and effective. The inadequate will become adequate and the incompetent competent with administrative leadership.

The administrative process involves pastor and people in planning, organizing, delegating, staffing, coordinating, and controlling. A pastor should not have to neglect the ministry of the church. And if the clergy takes the administrative role seriously, the work as prophet, priest, evangelist, and counselor will be enhanced and extended by the strength, purpose, and unity of the congregation.

Failure to administer will be failure to minister adequately.

**The Pastor as Community Leader**

As the pastor takes on a role in the community as a leader in social, civic or political areas, it should be understood by the clergy, the congregation, and the community that he/she represents the church in that leadership role, Seldom can a pastor hold separate positions without conflicts arising in either one or both. But if the church is led into social, civic or political activities, many community problems can be effectively resolved, more than could be done by the pastor alone. Anything not appropriate for the church’s involvement should not be part of the minister’s work in the community.

Sometimes it is necessary that the pastor and church stand against activities in the community. When this is necessary, they should do so boldly and forcefully. The real needs of the community can be faced and solved more effectively through group actions which anticipate and advance positive programs that build the spiritual atmosphere in the community. This is a role that only the Church can provide as it is led by community-conscious pastors.

The clergy should alert the church to community needs by making announcements from the pulpit, calling special meetings to address the problem, and appointing committees or delegating responsibility to capable hands selected from the church membership. Moral and spiritual implications of community problems should also be addressed from the pulpit.
Most of all, as with other problems faced by the church and its ministry, the pastor should lead the congregation to call upon and claim divine control over the life of the church and its membership and seek spiritual guidance in all its activities, both public and private. As the church responds to the leadership of Christ, it will find itself and its pastor involved in every area of community life, transferring the love of Christ to all in need.

The Pastor as Counselor

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The Pastor as Evangelist

As an evangelist to the church and community, the pastor needs to have a genuine desire to see the lost saved. This love of people should be so great, and the burden of their needs so heavy, that the clergy maintains a constant state of prayer, interceding for them before the throne of God.
Intercessory prayer is offered to God concerning the needs that are acceptable to His will. In the name of Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the pastor presents the needs of a lost brother or sister.

The minister who intercedes for the lost in the church and community must realize that salvation is of the Lord, not of man. Like Moses with the children of Israel, the pastor offers that which God can use to bring about the miracle, speaking, giving witness, and testifying of God’s love and mercy in all acts of daily living. A minister will also go out and seek the lost sheep, that they may be brought into the Master’s fold.

Being open and friendly with all people sets an example of love and evangelistic zeal before the church and community. Yet, the clergy should not participate with candidates for conversion in practices or circumstances that may compromise Christian witness or discourage others who seek a higher or better way. When approached by people beset with personal problems, the pastor needs to be a good listener who is genuinely concerned and identifies with each person’s needs. As a clergy gains experience in a ministry of evangelism, an increasing awareness of God’s transforming grace and power will equip for more effective witnessing.

The evangelistic ministry of a pastor begins with bold and forceful preaching of the plan of salvation from the pulpit. Since a clergy is also the administrator of the spiritual life of the church, the planting of seed from the pulpit will be followed by organization of the ministry-minded into prayer groups and visitation teams. Using these methods, the whole church is alerted to the opportunities the Lord provides for outreach and in-gathering.

The evangelistic role of the pastor and church does not stop when a lost person is saved. The clergy must provide follow-up with the new “babe in Christ” as a church ministry. The additional contact often provides the greatest opportunity of all to present Christ to the new convert’s close friends and acquaintances. They may be affected more by what has happened to their friend than by anything a minister or visitation team may ever say or do. Channeling the Gospel story of salvation in Christ through the new convert to a wider circle of potential converts becomes a very effective way of reaching others who are lost.

The pastor may be a good evangelist to the church and community in many other specific ways. The foundation of all such efforts must rest upon prevailing, intercessory prayer by the ministry of the pastor and concerned church members.

**The Pastor as Preacher**
Today’s clergy has a many-sided ministry. A small fraction of time is spent in the pulpit, yet this is one area where the impact of ministry is keenly felt. Although much of the minister’s time is spent with individuals or small groups, the majority of the congregation may only be aware of the pastor’s leadership of the worship service and preaching. People look on preaching as the most significant and most visible thing the pastor does. All preachers should be diligent in pastoral work because of its importance. But it cannot take the place of preaching or fully compensate for lack of power in the pulpit.

While some people would refer to preaching as an art, others call it a profession. Still others would say it’s a science. Unfortunately, there are those who make it a business.

The Bible speaks of preaching as a gift. The apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus about being made a minister of the Gospel by the gift of the grace God (Ephesians 3:7). He went on to say (v.8) that this grace was given that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see. Paul was speaking of illumination that makes people feel something and see something. Paul saw himself as a man who had been given a double privilege-discovering that it was God’s will that all people should be gathered into the secret of His grace and love and being given the responsibility of making this secret known to the Church. Paul was the instrument whereby God’s grace went out to the Gentiles.

Preaching has been referred to as the humanly impossible art of letting God speak. This art of letting God speak only becomes possible when a preacher is first and foremost an interpreter of the Word of God. Proclamation of the Word of God brings enlightenment, knowledge, and conviction.

Why is preaching important? In Jesus’ ministry, preaching occupied a central place. He “came preaching.” In the synagogue at Nazareth He described Himself as having been divinely ordained to “preach good tidings to the poor.. .to proclaim release to the captives.. .to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19 JBPV). All the Gospels picture Jesus in the synagogues, on the mountains, by the sea, in village after village, amazing the people by His words of grace and the authority of His teaching.

The Lord preached. For their mission after Him, Jesus bequeathed the same strategy to His apostles. Preaching was His announced purpose for them when He chose them. At the end of His ministry, Jesus gave them the Great Commission which, according to Mark, was a simple command to go everywhere preaching the Gospel. According to Matthew, the purpose was to be threefold: to make disciples, to lead to confession and baptism, and to instruct in Christian living according to His commands. In the Book of the Acts and in the Epistles, as well as in the strength of the Church at the end of the apostolic period, the record of the power of their preaching is evident.
Good preaching is one way God’s Word addressed human need. Few congregations go through a week without some member experiencing serious hurt. The minister never steps into the pulpit without facing someone who longs for healing. A seminary professor was remembered as saying, “In every sermon you preach, have a word of sympathy. Somebody who hears you needs it.”

John Ruskin described the worship hour as “that hour when men and women come in, breathless and weary with the week’s labor, and a man ‘sent with a message,’ which is a matter of life and death, has but thirty minutes to get at the separate hearts...to convince them of all their weaknesses, to shame them for all their sins, to warn them of all their dangers, to try by this way and that to stir the hardfastening of those doors...thirty minutes to raise the dead in!”

As counsel the sermon will help to clarify life. If the sermon does its work, the problem is understood and the solution is also understood. The counseling focus of the sermon becomes real when the hearer is centered in the midst of the message and its truth. By this, the hearer is called to account. Biblical preaching is the wedding of spiritual truths to human problems.

Good preaching benefits the preacher. It is exciting to know that the Holy Spirit has used a person in the pulpit to help others. God anoints people to preach because He wants something significant to occur. Using the Bible, preaching radiates meaning. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, preaching radiates presence. To preach Christ is to offer a treasure that nothing else in the world can provide.

The extraordinary thing about the Gospel is that it has been preached and heard for nearly two thousand years. Yet, as long as people are spiritually awake, it can never be stale, Staleness lies in the mind and spirit of the preacher or the hearer. Paul spoke of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8 KJV) which could just as well be thought of as the “unfathomable” or “inexhaustible” riches of Christ.

Some words of wisdom to the preacher were written many centuries ago by St. Augustine, yet they sound like thoughts from a very up-to-date workshop on preaching. “For a man speaks more or less wisely to the extent that he has become more or less proficient in the Holy Scriptures. I do not speak of the man who had read widely and memorized much, but of the man who has well understood and has diligently sought out the sense of the Scriptures. For there are those who read them and neglect them, who read that they may remember but neglect them in that they fail to understand them. Those are undoubtedly to be preferred who remember the words less well, but who look into the heart of the Scriptures with the eye of their own hearts. But better than either of these is he who can quote them when he wishes and understands them properly.”

Sports figures, outstanding musicians, and artists dedicate excellent performances to people dear to them, such as their teachers or managers. How much more should preachers be able to dedicate each of their sermons to the Lord. The sermon should be the preacher’s gift of worship to God.

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The Pastor as Promoter

One of the most practical roles of a pastor is that of a promoter, even though many would not associate that idea with ministry. Thinking of being a promoter may seem to smack of hucksterism or commercialism.

Yet, promotion can determine the success or failure of many of the church’s programs. Many pastors do more promoting than they realize. Announcing the next service and composing the bulletin are both methods of promotion. It must be done well if people are expected to respond. A well-put announcement can make the difference in whether a family or more decide to attend or participate in church functions and ministries.

If the good news of the Gospel is proclaimed, if the congregation is a warm, loving group of people who make others welcome and want to be a blessing to them, it needs to be known. The list of other features in the local church worthy of promotion may be long: excellent teachers; meaningful Bible studies; talented musicians; church library; youth, family, singles, aging ministries; fellowship and Christian nurture opportunities; and an active outreach ministry.

A pastor should not be afraid to promote himself/herself. This can be done without anyone feeling the clergy has an ego problem. Many persons are waiting to hear that a warm and caring person is available to minister to their needs and those of their families. Sermons must be promoted to let people know interesting and inspiring messages can be expected.

The church’s building and location should be promoted. Although every facility has areas that could be improved, the positive aspects should be noted. People need to be reminded of programs such as camp, Vacation Bible School, home department ministries, nursing home visitation, films, and special music or dramatic presentations.

The local conference or eldership offers workshops and retreats. The General Conference offers Diagnostic Clinics, Church Growth Workshops, Celebration of Life Weekends, and Discipleship Seminars. Speakers are available from Findlay College, Winebrenner Seminary, the General Conference staff, and other church-related institutions.

How can promotion be done? Newspapers in small cities and towns usually publicize church announcements at no cost. Announcement of a special service may be accepted as a news release. Shoppers’ guides often will do the same. Radio stations may announce events as a community service. Every available opportunity should be used to promote the church positively. A cancellation due to bad weather could be announced by saying, “The Sunday evening service at ______________ Church has been cancelled. However, the Wednesday night prayer service (or Bible study) will be held as usual at 7:30 p.m.” Midweek or Sunday night services, which many churches do not provide, could also be noted.
No printed material or announcement on radio or TV can take the place of the impact of a congregation’s actual ministering to its community’s needs. That’s the way the Bible tells believers to go about it. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and will glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 KJV). As a local church works to do the Father’s will, people will be attracted to the fellowship that impacts the community for good.

The Pastor as Shepherd

No title that a minister of the Gospel shares is more picturesque than that of "shepherd.” It is the title Jesus assumed in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd.” The title was filled with practical and rich association because Jesus moved among and ministered to a pastoral people. Their heritage was anchored in the nomadic culture of their forefathers.

While the figure of the shepherd is not one with which a modern high tech society would readily identify, the pastoral allusions are not obscure to the person who has some historical perspective or biblical background.

The imagery of John 10:11 is that Jesus is the Good Shepherd as contrasted to the hireling or poor shepherd. The latter does the job for pay with a minimum of commitment. The hireling will shepherd within the parameters of the normal but will not demonstrate a caring that could be costly.

The picture of the shepherd is one of a strong defender who wields the weaponry of the trade to protect the sheep. The shepherd is a leader-provider. When some of the resources that make for a strong and healthy flock may be absent, the shepherd leads the flock to the grasses that are green and waters that are still. A unique and intimate exists between shepherd and sheep. The shepherd communicated well. The flock knows the shepherd’s voice and the shepherd knows the flock. So sharp and distinct is that relationship that the sheep will not follow a stranger.

The ultimate in caring is expressed in that the shepherd will lay down his/her life for the sheep. The shepherd will scale the treacherous precipice to rescue the one that is lost or has strayed. The sheepfold will be guarded with the shepherd’s own being and the staff will be wielded with skill and wisdom to ward off predators and poachers.

The shepherd role of the pastor is one which expresses ultimate caring. In a real measure, the roles of preacher, administrator, prophet, and priest are at the least impoverished if the clergy does not have the shepherd’s concern, the pastoral heart.

The shepherd must lead the people as opposed to following them. Leadership that will bring nourishment and sustain spiritual health must be provided. The people must be defended with skill so that they will not be destroyed by the ravenous forces of overt evil or subtle ignorance. The shepherd must have a fearless commitment to the preservation of the flock.
None of these can be successfully fulfilled without intimacy and knowledge. The pastor must know the church congregation in a way that will enable speaking and ministering with compassion and authority because he/she has walked in their shoes, broken bread with them, sat where they sat, cried when they cried, and laughed when they laughed.

The pastor is not “The Shepherd.” The clergy is an under-shepherd of the Lord who is the Good Shepherd. The pastors’ skills, abilities, sensitivity, strength, and leadership must all be graced by the presence of Christ and empowered by His Spirit. Without the constraining power of a holy passion, a professional shepherd, regardless of skills, is just a hireling.

The shepherd never looks upon the congregation as ignorant and uninformed. The shepherd compassionately loves, leads, and serves in the name of Christ.

**The Pastor as Teacher**

Probably one of the most traditional and significant roles of the parish pastor is that of teacher. Historically the pastor has functioned as the chief teacher or “teaching elder” of the congregation.

Scripture notes many precedents for that role. Paul lists as qualifications for a pastor: “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2 NIV). Among the specific directives to Timothy in his function as congregational shepherd is this challenge: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13 NIV). Many interpreters note that in the list of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4, pastoring and teaching are listed in tandem, strongly suggesting Paul’s intention for them to be exercised simultaneously.

How then shall a pastor exercise the teaching role of the office” Three considerations are vital.

**The Methodology of Teaching as Pastor**

Modeling the truth. It is an inescapable fact that the pastor’s own person is the most consistent and conspicuous teacher of the biblical truth. The pastor must pay special attention to his/her own conduct, attitudes, relationships, and words as a Christian.

Exposition of the Word informal settings. Foremost among these settings is the pulpit. This is the primary arena for teaching a congregation if by no other fact than sheer presence. No number of classes or one-on-one visitations will replace the opportunity to teach via the pulpit. Preparation of the sermon should always be at the top of the pastor’s list of priorities.
Likewise, the minister teaches in Sunday school classrooms, Bible studies, informal leadership development programs, and pastor’s classes. The clergy must not negate the advantage of extensive training by giving insufficient time to these opportunities. Sometimes pastors rely on their superior grasp of the content, natural skills, and the learner’s ignorance to justify shoddy preparation and inferior presentation. But probably more important is the reminder that in these settings, the pastor also teaches how to teach. Teaching opportunities, even more than the pulpit, give the pastor the responsibility to instruct a group on how to teach.

Even the administrative functions of church business meetings and planning sessions are teaching opportunities, not just in administrative skills or ecclesiastical insights, but also in biblical truths. Each interaction with a parishioner gives the pastor one more opportunity to convey, interpret, and reinforce the truth of Scripture and the biblical foundations for daily living.

Counseling and visitation. Informal times should never be overlooked as teaching opportunities. Here the teaching, especially in visitation, may be less direct, but a pastor should not see counseling times as merely “listening” or “behavior modification” sessions and visitation as mere “fellowship.” Teachable moments occur in these settings. A pastor should be prepared to use them gently, intelligently, and effectively to increase a person’s understanding of the Word.

All such small settings add one further dimension to teaching: the ability of the learner to respond to, test, and refine what is being learned. That is why teaching only via the pulpit, which is essentially one way communication, will never be sufficient for pastors to fulfill their roles as teachers.

Indirect methods. Newsletters, pastoral letters, even input in the selection of materials used by the church, are indirect ways the pastor can educate and teach the congregation.

The Fit Subject of the Pastor’s Teaching

These are so obvious, they need only listing: scriptural content, the functions of the church life, ethical and moral issues of Christian lifestyle, and relationships.

Equipping Oneself to Teach

Yes, the Lord equips, but He calls upon the pastor to use intentionally and systematically the tools He provides.

A study day. Teaching is so important that for the pastor to relegate preparations to the “holes” in his/her schedule is foolish, Although a congregation may not always be supportive of the time spent in the
study, if the pastor does not discipline himself/herself to regular and adequate study time, the church will ultimately pay a price.

What to study. Obviously, the Word of God is foundational. But also important are development materials and books on the Church and Christianity. Printed materials or publications from society, such as newspapers, periodicals and current books depict concerns, issues and trends. How can a pastor relate the relevance of the gospel to today’s culture if he/she does not know what is being said in newspapers, literature, and other secular reading materials?

Prayer and reflection. A person who teaches must be teachable. Prayer, meditation, and reflection times are part of the equipping. Evaluation of personal Christian experience and commitment are invaluable to effective teaching.

Continuing education. Some pastors tragically make the mistake of believing that a degree or ordination marks the termination of their training. The world changes, the church grows, new methods of communicating God’s truth are developed. To remain effective, a pastor must continue training. The clergy must never be so narrow as to depend upon his/her own expertise, but to learn from others. The hectic pace of parish life often deters intensive preparation, study or experimentation in an area of ministry. Outside resources or resource persons give the benefit of obtaining insight and knowledge from those whom God has allowed such preparation and experience.

The Pastor as Worship Leader

The pastor carries on the priestly tradition of worship leader within the church. As worship leader, the minister finds motivation in the servant role. Thus, the servant seeks to draw the focus of the congregation to the divine rather than to self. The leader constantly creates conditions that are favorable for the manifestation of God to His people.

As a worship leader, the clergy is in touch with the congregation-relating to needs, feeling the pain, and celebrating the joy of those who are worshiping. A pastor must be as sensitive to the needs of the people being led in worship as a shepherd is sensitive to the needs of his flock.

For the leader, being in touch with the congregation also involves worshiping with them. The pastor is not only a leader, but one who worships as well.

In entering the chancel, the pastor should be ready to conduct the entire service without need of interruptions. Preparation should be thorough and complete, covering all parts of the experience. Planning for worship should include not only the written and spoken word, but the usage of the facility. Proper preparation will enhance the leader’s ability to read Scripture, develop confidence, and assist the congregation to worship.
The worship leader should realize he/she plays a dynamic role in creating and transmitting the mood of worship. Even though the planned worship service reflects a mood of worship, the leader will accentuate that mood or detract from it, depending on the manner in which the service is led. Therefore, the pastor needs to be skilled in speaking and in the dynamics of public worship. The minister will seek to lead worship in a dignified, reverent manner that allows the Spirit to move rather than have confusion and distractions. When the congregation has been enabled to experience the divine in worship, the role of the worship leader has been accomplished.

**Ministerial Ethics**

The minister of Jesus Christ is called to adorn the doctrine of God. The pastor’s life and conversation, every word and deed, should reflect the glory of God. The clergy must be a person of integrity, compassion and love.

The minister is a human being, but in a measure is not just another person. The pastor has recognized a call from God and has been set apart by the church. As a leader, the clergy has accepted the marching orders of his/her faith and the Church. Although still subject to all the normal limitations and frailties of life as are others, the minister must live up to higher expectations than most. This is by reason of the high calling, acceptance of the church’s ordination, and personal commitment to the message and ministry of the Church. The resources of the God who calls and the church that has set the minister apart are to provide grace and strength to meet those expectations.

It is expected that the pastor take into consideration all the ethical principles of the church. Ethical behavior is not alone a matter of personal choice. Behavior in a given situation must satisfy more than personal judgment for there is the standard of ethical judgments made by the church as a body. This standard represents the wisdom of larger community of faith and was made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Is there no place for a personal ethical standard? There is. But when a personal ethical standard diverges radically from that of the church, the pastor must accept the standard of the church. If such acceptance is not possible, it is a matter of integrity and good ethics to be in consultation with the body that ordained the pastor through the appropriate commissions. The clergy should work to seek direction in the matter.

The high calling in Christ carries general expectations. The pastor...

Faithfully proclaims the gospel.

Fully affirms the church that has ordained him/her and fully supports its ministries.
Accepts responsibility for the defense of the Church against individuals and forces that would seek to destroy unity and mission.

Is held accountable for all personal actions and must never violate the confidences and sacred trusts of others.

Should enhance his/her ministry by further study and development of skills

Respects the ministry of colleagues within and without the fellowship.

A generally accepted code of ethics relates to the work of the ministry:

The pastor, in biblical terminology, is a keeper of the flock. Boundaries are assumed. One pastor does not tend another’s flock.

When pastoral services are requested by members of another church because of friendship or other reasons, including weddings, funerals, communion, hospital or home visits, these ministries should be cleared with the pastor of the church to which the member belongs.

Visits of a pastor to a former parish, even for personal reasons, such as a strong friendship developed while ministering there, should be infrequent and with a clear understanding developed with the pastor of that parish.

Proselyting is not ethical nor beneficial to the Church. Persons do have the right to choose. They may find a greater sense of fulfillment or opportunity to grow in one congregation than another. This is their decision. A pastor’s responsibility is to minister to those who are under his/her care.

Those seeking that care, even though from another parish, can be ministered to without special attention designed to separate them from that other parish. A good relationship with fellow pastors can make fruitful ministry possible for those who may desire a change of congregations.

Time management is essential for everyone. A minister is accountable not only to the Lord, but the church and the conference that ordains him or her. In pursuit of ministry, a pastor often works independently. An unusual amount of time spent in community affairs, recreational adventures, hobbies, etc. can be a “theft of time” and thence, unethical. A pastor is on call constantly. Hours cannot be fixed. Time must be managed in keeping with the high calling of the ministry.

A pastor holds an influential position. People place confidence in the leadership and counseling provided. They respond with gratitude to the pastor’s services, visitations, and affections. These should never be used for personal gain or aggrandizement.
As servants of the Lord, ministers bear responsibility to uphold all His servants. The use of the pulpit, press, classroom or private conversation to judge another pastor to strengthen one’s own image is wrong. Theological, ecclesiastical, and sometimes moral stances differ among pastors within and without one’s own communion. Ministers have a responsibility to affirm their beliefs and practices, but affirmation is not made credible by defamation of another.

Many circumstances are not and cannot be covered in this brief article. A general and yet precise directive is given by the Lord in Matthew 7:12 (NIV), “In everything do to others what you would have them do to you.”
LIFE NECESSITIES

Health Insurance

The Churches of God, General Conference recommends that every pastor participates in a health insurance plan. Health care for a family is very important and can be very unpredictable. Preventive health care is an important part of family life and a responsible approach to proper health care.

Unfortunately, the cost of preventive, regular and emergency health care is extremely expensive for a family. Families without health insurance coverage often settle for emergency health care only and are usually left with huge medical bills when that occurs.

Likewise, it is very costly to provide health insurance coverage for a family. A congregation should assume the responsibility to do all that it can to ensure that their pastor is provided with this necessity. While some CGGC regions are able to provide group coverage, others are not. In any event, it should be the desire and action of congregations to see that their pastor and his family need not have to worry about the extreme financial burden of health concerns.

Disability Insurance

A pastor occupies a very important place in the life of a church. As leader of the congregation, his/her presence is essential in maintaining the ongoing vision, ministries, and functions of the local church. Consequently, his/her prolonged absence can be detrimental to the church.

At the same time, if a pastor finds that he/she is unable to fulfill the responsibility of their role as pastor for a prolonged period of time, due to a physical disability, the church is faced with the dilemma of providing for his/her continued salary while, at the same time, finding the need to secure other leadership, whether that be temporary or permanent.

When a church faces this situation, having a disability insurance policy for their pastor helps them in the decision-making process. It is also comforting for a pastor placed in such a situation to know that he/she will receive compensation and not place the burden on the church for a long period of time. A significant disappointment would be to discover that he/she has no further compensation.

Again, some of the local CGGC Regions/Conferences are able to provide group disability insurance while others are not. In any event, it should be a strong consideration of the local church.
**Life Insurance**

A church that values their pastor and his/her family would want to consider providing life insurance. In the event of the loss of the life of the pastor, a church would find itself in the awkward position of providing needed financial assistance for the pastor’s family. Especially when the family lives in the parsonage, tough decisions must be made that impact the family. If life insurance money is available to the family, these needs can be met without undue stress and with a practical, rather than emotional, approach.

**Retirement**

The Churches of God Pension Plan was established in 1971 to provide retirement benefits to pastors, church employees and their spouses and families. All employees of the Churches of God, General Conference and its related organizations and churches are eligible to participate.

Full participation requires a contribution of 12% of compensation to the plan. Members that fully participate receive life insurance coverage.

Contributions to the plan are invested in a selection of mutual funds. There are ten to twelve mutual funds available with a wide variety of investment styles. The member can elect to have the nine member Board of Directors manage the investments of the member can self-direct his/her own account. There are socially conscience funds available that do not invest in alcohol, tobacco or gaming companies.

Prior to retirement, access to the funds is provided in cases of hardship and/or disability. Certain requirements must be met to be eligible for pre-retirement benefits.

After retirement, there are multiple options for receiving benefits. A member can elect to have a lump sum distribution, periodic payments, or an annuity. These options can be used in any combination. Except for funds used to buy an annuity, any residual amounts in a members account at the time of death will be distributed to the member’s designated beneficiary.

This is a brief summary of a complex plan. Further information is available at 419-424-1961 or pensions@cggc.org.
Our Mission

As witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ
We commit ourselves to make more and better disciples
By establishing churches on the New Testament plan
And proclaiming the Gospel around the world.

Matthew 28:16-20
Ephesians 4:11-16
Acts 1:8

Core Values

1. We VALUE obedience to Jesus Christ in all situations.

2. We VALUE each individual as one who matters to God.

3. We VALUE dependence on and confidence in God’s ability to do more than we can ask or imagine; therefore, we are willing to take risks and expect that God will surprise us.

4. We VALUE Christ honoring, culturally relevant worship.

5. We VALUE evangelistic outreach ministry to those who do not yet belong to Christ and the church.

6. We VALUE each believer growing in Christ likeness and serving in ministry based on their spiritual gifts.

7. We VALUE vital reproducing congregations.

8. We VALUE trained, committed and competent leaders (pastors and lay persons).

9. We VALUE Christian unity within a diverse body of faith.

10. We VALUE accountability among believers and congregations.
Organizational Structure

![Organizational Structure Diagram]

What We Believe

The full statement of the beliefs of Churches of God, General conference can be found online at:

http://www.cggc.org/about/what-we-believe/

A copy can also be forwarded in PDF format upon request.

Statement of Faith
(This section is a summary of We Believe, the doctrinal statement of the Churches of God, General Conference.)

We believe in God, that He is three persons but one God and both hidden and revealed. It is His holiness that provides for humanity’s deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. His Work is primarily creation, grace, justice and mercy. God wants us to know Him and has revealed Himself to us in various ways.
We believe in Jesus Christ and in His pre-existence. He became incarnate and was truly human and wholly God. The characteristics of Jesus’ divinity are the very characteristics of God. He is Savior and Lord. He died and was resurrected and ascended into heaven. This same Jesus will come to receive us that we may be with Him forever.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, that He is God and came into the world in a new way at Pentecost. He can be known and experienced. He endows the followers of Christ with the “unity of the Spirit.” His function in the Church, through the work of sanctification, is producing spiritual fruit and dispensing spiritual gifts.

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We believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible authority, the Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice. God uses the words of men to convey His truth. The central message of the Scriptures is the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Proper interpretation of the Bible comes from the Holy Spirit.

We believe humanity’s importance to God and in our created nature. Humanity has a sinful nature. We also have the potential of a new nature in Christ. We are created free moral agents and are accountable to God for choices made. We are free to make the decision to accept Christ. We are no less free to turn away from God and be lost. God does provide power for living a victorious Christian life.

We believe humanity’s salvation is in our regeneration, new birth, when we respond to God’s offer. Humanity is justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the law, or by works of our own righteousness. Justification includes remission and restoration, bestowed righteousness of God, and new standing before God. Sanctification is both instantaneous and progressive. The believer’s life and character are transformed by consecration to God. It is the privilege and duty of believers to live holy lives.

We believe the Church is God’s called-out people who have specific rights and responsibilities. The Church enjoys a special kind of fellowship which is rooted in the Christian’s common fellowship with the Father. The Church should be a servant to God and humanity and apply New Testament principles to its life.

We believe Christ has given the Church three divine ordinances: Baptism, Feet Washing and the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward grace. It is to be practiced by those who profess faith in Christ and express commitment to follow Him. Baptism is not essential to salvation. It is to be administered by immersion.

Feet Washing is a celebration of the Incarnation and reminds us of our calling to be servants. It is an expression to our love for one another. It reminds us of our need to minister and to be ministered unto.

The Lord’s Supper, also known as Communion, is intended to remind us of Christ’s atoning death. It is a proclamation of hope. This ordinance is open to all Christians.
We believe in the presentation of children for the Lord’s blessing, setting them apart for the Lord. Children are gifts of God and part of the covenant community. Parents are responsible for the spiritual nurture of their children. The congregation also shares this responsibility.

We believe in the Second Coming and ultimate victory of Jesus Christ. God will bring history to its proper close in His way and time. The message of end times is one of victory and fulfillment for Christians and the ultimate triumph of God’s Kingdom. Until then the mission of God’s people is to be salt and light in the world.

We believe in the bodily resurrection of believers. We believe judgment will accompany Christ’s return.

**Historical Introduction to the Churches of God, General Conference**

The Churches of God, General Conference began in 1825 as a result of the labors, revivals and ideas of John Winebrenner, a German Reformed pastor who ministered in and around Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

During the late 1820’s, Winebrenner came to new theological conclusions about the nature and government of the Church, the importance of the regenerating experience of the new birth and the ordinances (Believer’s Baptism by immersion, Lord’s Supper and Feet Washing). He reaffirmed the belief that the Bible was the “only authoritative rule of faith and practice.”

In 1830 he joined five other ‘teaching elders,” or ministers, in central Pennsylvania in forming an “eldership” for the purpose of adopting a system of cooperation.

As Churches of God settlers moved west, they established new churches and elderships in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Michigan. By 1900 the denomination had spread to Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma. Separate elderships had also been formed for churches in Maryland and West Virginia. The California Eldership began in 1948. Congregations from the Church of God chartered in Mississippi became the Mid-South Conference in 1983.

Churches of God once existing in Maine, Washington, Oregon, Colorado and other states have ceased to function.

A General Eldership was formed in 1845 to provide for cooperation between local elderships. Since the 1960’s, the trend has been to call judicatories “conferences” rather than “elderships” in recognition that representation is no longer limited to “elders.”

Churches of God periodicals, The Gospel Publisher (1835-1845) and The Church Advocate (1846-present), have played a key role in distributing information about and for the Churches of God and have provided forum for the discussion of important issues. Two other publications have had a long and distinguished history, The Gem, a Sunday school paper, began in 1867. The Workman was first published as a monthly lesson booklet in 1879 and became a quarterly in 1890. The denomination maintained its own printing establishment, Central Publishing House, in Harrisburg from 1901 to 1979.
Foreign mission work was established at Uluberia, India, in 1898 and at Bogra (now Bangladesh) in 1905. Members of Slovak descent started mission churches in Eastern Europe in 1922, but communist governments have thwarted this effort. Project HELP was begun in Haiti in 1967 and a ministry to Navajos began in New Mexico in 1976.

Findlay College was incorporated in 1882 and opened for classes as a Churches of God college in 1886. Winebrenner Seminary began as a graduate department of theology in 1942 and was chartered as a separate institution in 1960. Barkeyville Academy (1881-1906) in Pennsylvania and Fort Scott Collegiate Institute (1902-1917) in Kansas are other educational institutions once supported by the denomination.

Church camping had its start in 1931 with the first of three annual General Eldership camps. Within a few years several local elderships began to hold their own summer camping programs. Today most local elderships or conferences have camping programs. Many of them own and operate their own facilities, some on a year-round basis.

Three lay organizations have played an important part in the recent history of the denomination. The Churches of God Youth Advance (CGYA) was formed in 1947, the Women’s Christian Service Council (WCSC) in 1953 and the Churches of God Winebrenner Brotherhood (CGWB) in 1967.

The name of the denomination has changed several times. It was first known as the Church of God, in keeping with Winebrenner’s view that “there is but one true Church, namely: the Church of God.” The phrase In North America was added by the first General Eldership in 1845. In 1896 the name was made plural and became Churches of God in North America. In 1974 two changes were made. The phrase “In North America” was eliminated in recognition of the Churches of God members in India, Bangladesh and Haiti. “General Eldership” was changed to “General Conference” in recognition that delegates were no longer limited to “elders.” Thus, the correct name of the denomination today is Churches of God, General Conference.

The Churches of God, General Conference is a Pennsylvania corporation organized and existing under the act of April 18, 1867, P.L. 1295 and subsequent charter amendments.

The Administrative Office and operational headquarters of the Churches of God, General Conference is located at 700 East Melrose Avenue in Findlay, Ohio, in the Center for Christian Ministries, constructed by the Churches of God in 1981.

**Constitution**

The full copy of the Constitution of the Churches of God, General Conference can be found online at:

[http://www.cggc.org/about/cggc-constitution/](http://www.cggc.org/about/cggc-constitution/)

A copy can also be forwarded in PDF format upon request.
Sexual Misconduct Policy

The full copy of the Policy and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct can be found online at:


A copy can also be forwarded in PDF format upon request.

Resources

The Church Advocate

The Church Advocate is a quarterly newspaper provided free of charge to all families in the Churches of God, General Conference. It contains news from local churches, regions and the General Conference. We encourage every church to send in stories and photographs of what their congregation is doing. We also publish a classified section which includes New Members, Baptisms, Child Dedications and Obituaries. Items may be submitted to: The Church Advocate, P.O. Box 926, Findlay, OH 45839 or emailed to the Editor, Rachel Foreman, at communications@cggc.org.

Logo Use

Guidelines for the use of the Logotype for the Churches of God, General Conference

This official logotype of the Churches of God has been adopted and copyrighted by the Churches of God, General Conference.

The use of the logo by affiliated conferences, congregations and related member organizations is encouraged. The goal is to have it become an instantly-recognized symbol of the Churches of God.

The logo depicts the relationship between Christ and His church.

Person after person has seen this logo and has seen something different. Here are a few examples:

The long arm of the Cross symbolizes Jesus reaching out to the penitent.

“Churches” are under the Cross just as the church is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Cross is an integral part of the life of the church.
The circle represents the totality of God, drawing us together around the Cross, yet it is open to allow any who wishes to enter.

The flame represents the Holy Spirit always at work in the church. Some see a “W” in the flame as an identification of Winebrenner heritage.

**Use of Logo**

The logo of the Churches of God, General Conference is to be used exclusively for identification of conferences, congregations, ministries, publications’ promotional materials, etc. of the Churches of God, General Conference.

The logo may be used by affiliated conferences and congregations in ways that enhance the ministry and witness of the Churches of God. The nature and image of the church is to be maintained by appropriate and suitable use of the logo.

The logo is to be used as initially designed with the inclusion of the identifying words “Churches of God.” A local conference, congregational or organizational name may be included in lieu of the words “General Conference.” Any alteration or adaptation of the logotype must be approved in advance.

The logo may be used for the purpose of promoting appropriate church activities and approved fund raising by member church organizations. Permission for such use is to be secured from the local church in advance. Any gain or profit realized from the production and sale of the logo must be for an affiliated church or one of its organizations. The logo may not be used commercially for gain or profit, or any other purpose, by a person or organization not directly related to the Churches of God, General Conference.

Permission to use the denominational logo does not authorize solicitation or sales across conference or judicatory bounds. Sales across conference or judicatory bounds is limited to the national auxiliary organizations recognized by the General Conference unless special approval is otherwise granted.

Questions or special requests pertaining to the use of the logo of the Churches of God, General Conference should be addressed to the CGGC office by calling (419) 424-1961.
Leader’s Edge

Leaders Edge is a monthly newsletter provided free of charge to all pastors in the Churches of God, General Conference. It is coedited by Herb Miller and Lyle E. Schaller and contains ideas and insights for active congregations.

Winebrenner Theological Seminary

http://www.winebrenner.edu/home.asp
Special Services

Special services present an opportunity for celebration within the body of Christ. The wise use of special services will also provide opportunity to invite and encourage those outside of the body to attend a local church.

A number of resources are available to help a minister in planning special services. One such resource is available through the General Conference. Additional resources are available through local Christian Bookstores in the ministry resources section. A wise minister will acquire and make good use of those resources to amply plan special services. Following are some specific services the church should consider.

THE ORDINANCES

We in the Churches of God recognize three specific ordinances: Baptism, Communion and Feet Washing. Any one of the ordinances may be offered either as a private worship encounter or as a special corporate celebration of the Church community. The use of a special service does encourage individual believers as well as the church body as a whole.

Baptism: A celebrative service of the Church, which commemorates the baptized person’s life in and identification with the Church, or the Body of Christ. It is a ritual in which the person is immersed in water in order to signify the deeper meaning of Baptism - that is, repentance and commitment to God’s will, (“We Believe” pg 33). Although the observance of baptism is personal for the believer, it is an ideal opportunity for the entire body to rejoice together as a family.

Communion: A service that commemorates the event instituted by our Lord with His disciples during his final night with them. The two elements of communion include bread, as a symbol of the broken body of Christ, and wine, as a symbol of the blood of Christ shed for the sins of humanity. The service of communion may be both contemplative and celebrative. It’s contemplation comes first as we remember the burden of Christ and his sacrifice for us. It is also contemplative in that it is a time that demand examination of one’s self as we participate. Communion should also have a component of celebration. Because of the sacrifice of Christ we have the opportunity to experience the forgiveness of our sin and to take upon us the promise of eternal life made possible by His victory of death and the grave. There is also another celebrative factor in that when we take communion we not only recall his death, but also look to his second coming. We practice open communion, welcoming any and all born again believers to participate with us. (“We Believe” pg 38)
There is no Biblical mandate to the frequency of this service. This is at the discretion of local church traditions and practice. Communion should at least be observed during Holy Week and on worldwide communion Sunday. Some churches observe it quarterly and others even more frequently. When planned appropriately, it will be a blessed and unifying service of the church.

Feet Washing: A ceremony also instituted by our Lord during that last night he was with his disciples (John 13). This observance is more personal than either of the other two ordinances. While a public worship setting is okay, a small personal setting may augment a cherished experience for the participants. Feet washing may be done in harmony with communion or as a separate service. This fine tradition of the church should be emphasized as very special event in the individual believer as he relates to his fellow servants. (“We Believe” pg. 35)

BABY DEDICATION:

The event of new life is cause for joy and commemoration. Parents should be instructed that while the Churches of God does not practice infant baptism, we do encourage and promote baby dedication as an accurate biblical concept (“We Believe” pg. 40). Baby dedication is a commitment of the parents to raise their child within the influence of Judeo-Christian family values and in the instruction of the New Testament church. While dedication does not provide salvation, it will hopefully be the seed planted within an intentional family commitment that will one day take root and provide an environment to encourage the child to accept Christ as they grow and mature.

NEW MEMBERS:

The Churches of God endorses a formal membership role. One of the more endearing purposes of local church membership is the opportunity for a public statement of commitment by an individual to serve God through a local church of his/her choice. It is understood that “church membership” does not provide for, nor enable personal salvation. We join the local church not to be saved, but because we are saved. As a church member we are given opportunity to encourage other believers as well as to influence the general ministry and outreach to those not yet saved. Therefore, each perspective church member should be adequately instructed concerning the principles, doctrines and practices of the Churches of God General Conference. (Ref. “Membership” of this manual)

SENDING/COMMISSIONING:

At certain times, members of a local church may be called to other ministries such as pastor, training, missions, etc., that will require relocation. Such events may be commemorated by a commissioning or sending service. Such services should be done as a true celebration and understanding that this is not the loss of leadership, but an opportunity to expand the influence of those disciples of the local church. A public service would be encouraged and if possible to use the resources of regional or general conference representatives when appropriate.
GROUND BREAKING:

It is appropriate to have a groundbreaking ceremony at the onset of a building program; this is basically a formal act in which the first shovel of ground is symbolically dug or turned for expansion or new construction. An open public service and should include an appropriate message or speaker that will address the value of vision and faith taken by the local church.

DEDICATION/CONSECRATION:

To dedicate or consecrate is a formal and symbolic service of a commitment to use physical items for the ministry of Christ and his church. Such services may include portions that will be both celebrative and contemplative. This is a time of public testimony of the local church saying that all things are of and from the Lord and are to be used for His glory and service.

New Buildings: Upon completion of a new building, a public worship service should be held in which the new facility is formally dedicated to the ministry of Christ and his Church. Such services may include local community leaders, design and construction representatives, and regional and general conference leaders. The formal service need not be held as the first service in a building. It is often advantageous to make use of the building a few weeks to assure that mechanical and technical components are functioning correctly. The service should be held in the first few months of occupancy. There are a variety of formats available. The formal worship should include regular worship components and also incorporate comments by guests, an appropriate message of challenge and thankfulness of God’s blessings. There is often a formal presentation of the key from the contractor to the appropriate leader within the church. At some point a formal prayer of dedication should be offered.

Improvements: Similar to new construction, the remodeling or improvements of the physical building should be dedicated with an appropriate service to commemorate and celebrate the completion of the project. A format similar to new construction may be followed.

Equipment: The purchase of new equipment can be as exciting as new construction. Equipment items that provide opportunity for public worship event includes worship articles such as Narthex or sanctuary furniture, Communion servers, pews/chairs, musical instruments (organ, piano, etc.), sound equipment, artwork, etc. While new equipment may not seem as dynamic as a new building, it is comparatively as important to the work of the church.

MORTGAGE BURNING:
Being released from the debt of a previous project is a true opportunity of celebration. Such services may include representative of mortgage holder in which a document is symbolically presented to appropriate church leaders who will in turn be led in a ceremony of burning the mortgage. Care should be used in the actual burning to avoid violating any fire laws and to prevent any damage to carpet or furniture. There are a variety of formats available. The formal worship should include regular worship components and also incorporate comments by guests, an appropriate message of challenge and thankfulness of God’s blessings. At some point a formal prayer of thanksgiving should be offered.

**INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS:**

A special service to install new officers each year should be done either the Sunday prior, or the first Sunday of the church year. This is a very special event in which the congregation publicly entrusts their representative authority upon the elected persons. The service should include a formal introduction of each officer and a brief description as to area of service. The installation should include a charge to those elected and another charge to the congregation who has demonstrated their trust in these individuals to lead.

**INSTALLATION OF A PASTOR:**

The installation of pastor(s) should be done in cooperation with the regional/conference leadership. A special speaker may be either a person selected by the new pastor or a representative of the appropriate region/conference. The message should address the biblical role of the pastor as well as the biblical model of church and pastor relationship. At an appropriate point of the service, a formal installation should be led by regional /conference personnel. An example of this is available in the CGGC minister’s handbook.

A should be noted that a formal installation is only a few minutes in length and should include appropriate scripture, a charge to the pastor to be a faithful servant to Christ and his church. It will also include another charge to the congregation to support the pastor as God’s servant and leader for them. It should be concluded by the laying on of hands and a prayer of service for the new pastor. It is appropriate for the newly installed pastor to give a response and bring a close to the serve.

**Membership**

Church membership is the commitment of an individual believer to serve God through a local church. Becoming a church member neither provides nor elevates a personal salvation. It is because we are saved that we should desire to become a member and enjoy the fellowship of other Christians.
Historically, membership was held in high importance along with baptism and other religious acts. In some more contemporary interpretations, membership is seen with less spiritual and more personal meaning. In either context it must be understood that church membership is a commitment to serve God by working in cooperation with other believers.

A devoted church member will agree to support the local body through attendance, personal and spiritual service and financial support.

**QUALIFICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP:**

Any person desiring to be a member of a local Churches of God congregation must be a born again believer and follower of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they are expected to make public acknowledgement of their willingness to serve God through the particular congregation of their choice. Such acknowledgment will be done in a public worship setting as well as the person’s life testimony. Water baptism is not a stated requirement of membership. However, unless some extenuating circumstance exists that makes baptism physically unlikely, each church member should be encouraged to be baptized as the completion of their testimony of the saving grace of God.

**PROCESS FOR BECOMING A MEMBER:**

Each new member should be expected to make a formal testimony of his/her commitment during a regular worship service (see section on New Members under special services). The formal testimony should reflect the new member’s willingness to support the local church and regional and general conference and through his/her prayers, presence and tithes. A new member may be received by one of two processes. The first is by confession of faith. The other is by transferring their membership from another Church of God or another church of compatible doctrines and theology.

Confession of Faith: This process may vary slightly from one congregation to another, but certain components should be in place. First, an interested candidate should make his wishes known by a formal request or application process. That would be immediately followed by a personal interview by the pastor. Persons requesting membership should take part in a membership class.

This class should include components of the doctrines and beliefs of the Churches of God General Conference, including an overview of our polity and history. The class should also include instruction on local church practices, and operating procedures. A membership class should be conducted by the pastor and/or elders, or by someone prepared to teach this important instruction. An open forum of questions, answers and personal exploration will be advantageous as the participant seeks to discover the joy of serving Christ through Church membership.
If at any time during the process of application and training, a person decides not to join the local church, the teacher should respect the decision knowing that God works a greater work in the life of people than we can.

**Letter of Transfer:** When someone is a member in good standing of one church and wishes to become a member of a different church, that person should begin this process with a formal request or application process followed by a personal interview by the pastor. If the request for transfer is from another Churches of God Church, and there is no indication of problems in the previous church, a letter may be issued and sent to the previous church asking for a letter of transfer.

Participation in a membership class will help as a refresher to Churches of God beliefs and also instruct as to local church practices that could vary from the previous church. Upon receipt of a letter of transfer from a previous church, this person may be accepted as a member in good standing.

If the request for transfer is from a different denomination, care should be taken to assure the person is in agreement with the doctrines and practices of the Churches of God, General Conference. The advisable process is involvement in a membership instructional class.

Note: A letter of transfer is most often used when a member has re-located to a new geographical area. However, there are instances when a member may desire to transfer to a neighboring church. The pastor should verify that this request for transfer is in agreement by the person’s previous church. If there are unresolved relational issues at the previous church, these should be addressed. The member would be instructed and encouraged to address these issues and seek personal reconciliation before formal transfer is approved.

**APPROVAL FOR MEMBERSHIP:**

Churches should have a stated level of authority upon which the final word to approve membership is granted. This may be by a vote of the administrating church board upon recommendation of the pastor and elders or it may be entrusted to the elders and pastor alone. While the formal approval is appropriately entrusted to a smaller group of leaders, the congregation should similarly endorse the affirmation of that approval during the service of membership. This affirmation may be demonstrated by a show of hands, applause or even a hearty amen. This affirmation given by the body is not so much the legal aspect as it is a show of support from the body for the reception of a new member.

**RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS:**

Traditionally, a new member should be received into fellowship during a regular worship service (see special services) and planned as corporate celebration for the growing body of Christ’s Church. A sample of this service is found in the CGGC minister’s handbook and may include a number of factors, including the following:
A formal introduction of the new members.

Scripture Reading

Reading of the Churches of God covenant.

Statements of commitment of membership.

Special prayer for the new members.

Presentation of a membership certificate (sometimes a symbolic gift such as a bible is also given)

A symbolic greeting such as a handshake with pastor/elders is given as the extension of the hand of fellowship.

New members may be asked to share a word of testimony at some point in this service

WITHDRAWAL OF MEMBERSHIP:

Periodically a church member may request that their membership be withdrawn. The local pastor and/or elders should respond to the request. A member’s request should be respected, particularly if it is a request from another church to which they have requested membership (see transfer above). In such situations, it is appropriate to approve and send such letter to the receiving church. It is advantageous, and required in most churches, that letters of transfer be sent directly to the new church and not to the member. There is no policy for a member to be granted an open letter of withdrawal to be carried to any church they might choose.

When a member desires to withdraw due to an injurious relationship, every effort should be made to seek reconciliation. While the loss of that person as a church member may not occur, the greater need of spiritual harmony is the goal. If full reconciliation cannot be achieved and the member arduously seeks to have their name removed, the local church must respect that request and remove their name from the membership role.
MEMBERSHIP LIST PURGING:

After a period of time, a membership role may reveal names of persons who no longer attend the local church. This is a common occurrence if the list is not kept current to reflect deaths, relocation or other causes of natural attrition. Sometimes this could also reflect those who have gradually faded away from a commitment to the local church. In order to keep membership lists current, every church should have a policy by which the membership role is periodically reviewed. The practice of list purging must be taken very seriously. A person’s membership status is very personal and important, even though they may no longer attend. Therefore, any contact to inquire as to status of an inactive member must be in the spirit of the best interests of that member.

Deceased Members: In the event of a deceased member, it is normal to remove that name at an appropriate and respectable time.

Non-attendance: If someone has not attended nor contacted your church for a period of several months, usually 6 months to a year, they may be in jeopardy of losing their membership. However, efforts must be made to contact them to inquire as to their wish whether or not they want to remain a member. If lack of attendance is due to other extenuating circumstances, use this as an opportunity to extend ministry to the particular need.

The church should also be prepared to address issues of non-attendance resulting in church discipline due to repetitive unchristian conduct in a proper and respectable manner. While restoration is always a priority, particularly in spiritual ministry, it is also paramount to safeguard the spiritual testimony of the church.

Dual church Membership: Occasionally a person will want to remain a member for personal reasons, i.e. this is their home church where they grew up. If they have joined another body, a friendly reminder to them that church membership is not perpetual is in order. The practice of multiple memberships is not an acceptable standard. It is important to communicate, in a positive way, that the purpose of church membership is a commitment to attend and support a particular local church. Allow the person the opportunity to request either a transfer or removal of their name by their fruition.

Attitude of Purging: There are two sides to the purging issue. It is important for the church to model the attitude of Christ during this important but sensitive action. The act of purging and the role of a holy and pure church are certainly related, but the one should not be the platform of reform for the other. It is a delicate balance between right action and grace understanding. We must understand that the member in question may not understand the dynamics involved. The local church on the other hand, must determine the correct intent and purpose for updating or purging a membership role.
It may seem appropriate to remove a non-active member, however, this must be done in the attitude of grace. Another consideration is the reality that actions involving one member, though no longer active, may affect other members in the church. While this ought not to prohibit right and proper action, it is a consideration worthy of respect.

Final words on the attitude of purging—prior to the removal of any person make every attempt to exercise the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21) when appropriate. When a person is removed, attempt to do so in an attitude of fellowship and hope of a future day when the person may again rejoin the church.

The apostle Paul declares that “everything should be done in fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Though the context refers specifically to worship the principle applies more broadly to all that the church does including its organization.

**Leadership**

The New Testament clearly teaches that the church needs godly leadership to carry out its mission of world evangelization. This is apparent in scriptural examples and precepts. Jesus himself selected the twelve and empowered them. They in turn selected others. As needs emerged and as the Holy Spirit raised gifted new leaders to meet the needs, the church affirmed those called and sent them into ministry. This process continued throughout the New Testament period. As such it becomes a model for any contemporary church that seeks to be true to the Biblical pattern.

The New Testament vests local church leadership in two distinct offices. Basically elders oversee the work of the church and its spiritual well being while deacons tend to the physical and temporal needs of the congregation. Key passages (Acts 6:1-7; I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-4) outline the qualifications and duties of each office, but additional insights can be gleaned from many other New Testament verses. (See A Brief View by John Winebrenner for a Biblical study of the various passages and their implications for the church.)

**Elders:**

**Biblical Background**

In the New Testament two Greek words appear to designate this office. The first term episkopas (overseer) derives from Hellenistic society and refers to a presiding official in a religious or civic organization. The other term presbuterous (elder) comes out of Jewish tradition with an equivalent meaning. Hence in the New Testament the two words are used interchangeably. The duties of the overseer/elder include teaching (I Timothy 3:2), leading (I Timothy 3:5), pastoring and guarding the church (Acts 20:28-31).
A careful analysis of all the references to overseers and elders in the New Testament reveals that in the early church some were set apart because of giftedness (I Timothy 5:17), creating a distinctive type of elder. All elders need to exercise leadership and be able to teach, and all are to receive honor. However those who excel in leadership, Paul indicates are “worthy of double honor”. This is especially true for those whose “work” is preaching and teaching. Paul’s use of the word “work” suggests that these elders devote themselves to ministry in and through the church. His following illustrations also indicate that the double honor includes financial support. Essentially the preaching/teaching elder serves as the pastor of the congregation. Together all the elders of the congregation including the pastor or pastors form the eldership or the elder team in the local church. It is their collective responsibility to care for the flock (I Peter 5:1-4).

**Organization**

The biblical record offers only broad guidelines for establishing elders in the local church. The lack of specific direction allows therefore a certain freedom in methodology. However several basic principles in elder organization do arise from the New Testament text and provide useful guidelines for the contemporary church. This structural flexibility actually encourages each local congregation to determine what procedures work best in the local setting given specific biblical instructions and examples.

**Qualifications**

The Bible presents one set of standards for elders in the church. These requirements apply equally to all elders whether active in the word and/or ruling the church. This means that whether a person is called as a pastor-elder or chosen as a leading-elder both must meet certain qualifications before serving and overseeing the body of Christ, the church. These qualifications appear in several New Testament passages, principally I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and I Peter 5:1-4. John Winebrenner summarizes the specific directions given in these and other New Testament passages under four headings. An elder must demonstrate “grace, gifts, a disposition to use them, and a blameless or holy life. These four particulars form the principle ingredients, or prominent features, in the character of a faithful elder or ruler of the house of God.”
As to grace the elder must be “no more carnal but reconciled to God, and truly pious. In other words, he must be …soundly converted …radically changed in heart, and a partaker of the grace of God in truth.” This aspect of elder qualifications can hardly be over emphasized. Regarding gifts or “proper abilities” it is requisite that an elder be as the biblical texts delineate: sober, wise, apt to teach, etc. Furthermore an elder needs to be willing to use these and other gifts in ministry. Peter directed elders to “feed the flock of God; not by constraint, but willingly and of a ready mind.” (I Peter 5:2) Finally the elder’s lifestyle must be “blameless and holy” at home, in the church and before the world. Many of the biblical directives for elders fall into this category of reputation. By definition and practical experience an elder will not be a “novice” or new to the faith, but will be a person rooted and grounded in the word of God.

These qualifications need to be taken seriously by the church and its existing elders, as well as by any prospective new elder. This requires a through examination of any and all candidates. The review process falls chiefly to the existing elders, but the congregation must also be involved. I Timothy 3:10 clearly states that both types of church leaders (deacons and elders) must be proved first. The New Testament does not outline a process, but from the observation of a person’s faith, gifts, character, and lifestyle the existing elders and the congregation will know who is qualified or not to serve as an elder based upon the biblical guidelines. The elders should meet with any and every prospective elder to discuss the qualifications and duties in private. Afterwards the person should be presented to the church for their feedback. Ultimately the evaluation process seeks to identify a qualified, willing candidate for the position of elder whom the congregation can affirm.

**Selection & Term**

According to I Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:7, and I Peter 5:2 elders oversee the work and ministry of the local church. They lead, manage and direct (e.g. rule) its affairs. Hence in the selection of all leadership for the congregation they play a primary role, including the choice of new elders. In the New Testament apostles or their representative initially chose elders for the local churches. (See Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5.) In Titus 1 the term used does not refer to “a formal ecclesiastical ordination … but the appointment, for the recognition of the churches, of those who had already been raised up and qualified by the Holy Spirit, and had given evidence of this in their life and service.” (Vine, p.67) However, Acts 14 may suggest an interesting insight into the New Testament practice of elder selection. The root word *cheirotoneo*, “primarily used of voting in the Athenian legislative assembly”, [literally means] “to stretch forth the hand.” (Vine, p.69) The term as used in Acts 14 and again in II Corinthians 8:19 for a church representative may or may not refer to an actual show of hands (a vote), but certainly indicates congregational approval.
The New Testament offers no record of elder succession but continuity in leadership requires some method of replacement. Obviously the early church followed some means to maintain ongoing leadership. The twelve attempted a selection by lot to replace Judas (Acts 1:26), but it’s the last mention of the process and the person. Casting lots is little more than election by chance and runs contrary to the principles of elder and deacon selection found in the New Testament. Because the New Testament offers no particular paradigm for perpetuating church leadership, the local church receives a freedom of process that can be suited to the local body. The selection may be accomplished through the larger church body (the Conference) especially in the case of a new work, or a congregational reorganization for whatever reason. The eldership of the local church should be continued by the existing elders, or the congregation, or a combination of both. Ideally the existing elders play a key role in selecting and examining all prospective new leaders and presenting them to the congregation for approval. When a nominating committee is utilized the elders should serve as such or be well represented. In either case the elders ought to give approval to any proposed names. They know the church and the people best. Election to office requires the agreement of the congregation either by mutual consent or by majority ballot.

Just as the process of elder selection remains undefined in the New Testament, so does the issue of term. “The number of persons to be chosen is discretionary or optional with every particular church. Their number should be in proportion to the size and exigencies [needs] of each individual church.” (Winebrenner, p.70) Setting a fixed number of elders could actually be spiritually counterproductive. It could foster jealousies or deny qualified elders, called of God the opportunity to serve. If any number is to be set, it might be a minimum number, not a maximum. In addition the length of term can be determined by the will of the church. In certain situations individuals who prove themselves faithful to the Lord and the church might be designated by the congregation as life elders, not subject to removal except in the event of relocation, apostasy, or misuse of authority. In some cases it might be well to establish term lengths in order to facilitate periodic review and to permit the selection of new leadership. The local church could choose both life and term elders. However since “the Scripture gives no specified rule in this matter, it is unquestionably right for a majority of the members of each particular church to determine whether its officers are to be temporary or perpetual.” (Winebrenner, p.70)
Upon completion of the examination and selection process the church should set a time to publicly install any new or reelected elders. Again the New Testament provides only the barest guidelines for installation. From the available texts it appears that elders and other church leaders were formally installed into office by the laying on of hands, fasting, and much prayer. (Acts 13:3, 14:23, I Timothy 4:14) In fact the whole process of elder selection needs to be prayer oriented by all the parties involved. Often the church gives entirely too little time to prayer when making its leadership decisions. A public service seals the mutual decision to appoint a person to the eldership of the local church. It also confirms the person in the position and pledges the body to support that person in leadership.

**The Elder Team**

The elder team or eldership of the local church consists of all those who meet the biblical qualifications and have been called of God and affirmed by the local church to serve as elders. The team includes those who receive their livelihood from the church as well as those who do not. The responsibility of the team is to oversee the life and ministry of the congregation. They function as a team and though there may be some specialization in service they minister with equal responsibility and diligence. Shared leadership is the New Testament norm. Time and again the leadership of the local church is vested in the elders (plural). Over the centuries the church too often made the grave mistake of vesting leadership in either the episcopacy or the congregation. They stand as opposite poles in church leadership models, but neither holds up in a thorough examination of the apostolic record. Leadership in the first century church rested squarely upon the *presbuteroi* or elders.

Leadership by a council of elders appears throughout the Old Testament. It follows that the early church should utilize a similar pattern as seen in the temple and synagogues. This structure also resonated with the Greeks and Romans of the first century. It offers several benefits. It offsets weaknesses with strengths. Where one elder lacks another can fill the gap. It makes the work load lighter for all. Many hands make light work as grandfather often said. It provides a larger wealth of wisdom and experience to assist the church and help its people. It serves as a check and balance system providing accountability and credibility to the work of the church. It encourages the emergence of new leaders and thereby fosters the continuance and expansion of the gospel witness. It can have a downside such as inaction or slow action, but the benefits far exceed the difficulties.
As in any team individual members will assume particular responsibilities. All bear the responsibility of getting the job done, and all bear an equal load of accountability; yet, each elder will in their own unique way contribute to the team. I Timothy 5:17 declares “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” In every congregation there need to be and will be those elders who emerge as “first among equals”. Peter, James, and Paul served as such among the apostles. Such elders because of calling and giftedness serve on the elder team much like a quarterback or job foreman. They serve as the point person for the elder team. They lead the team, direct the work, and often serve as spokesperson. However they hold no exalted status and can never “lord it over” those whom they serve or work along side. Such elders may be worthy of double honor, but they don’t seek it. Often these persons make their livelihood from the ministry, devoting full time to service in the church.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

**Congregational Leadership**

Mission/Vision Development & Oversight: The elder team plays a critical role in vision casting for the congregation. They serve so to speak as the keepers of the flame. If they do not provide the congregation with a clear sense of mission and vision, as the prophet says “the people perish.” This responsibility to lead the congregation falls to a large degree upon the point elder, the one who is devoted to the preaching and teaching ministry. Generally speaking this elder serves as a catalyst for the other elders in identifying the church’s mission and articulating the vision. The result should be a clear understanding of purpose that the whole church shares. The resulting view of ministry will govern decision making and direction for the church. The job of the elder team extends beyond developing and promoting the mission/vision of the church to its implementation. The elder team needs to evaluate all congregational ministries in light of the mission and vision. It is their charge to keep church ministries on task and in accord with the stated mission/vision. On not less than an annual basis they need to review past progress and project future goals and objectives. As elders their task is to provide oversight in all areas of ministry in order to achieve greater effectiveness.

**Stewardship**

A steward is a caretaker of something that does not belong to him/her but to whom responsibility has been given by the owner. Therefore, the steward has a special relationship with the owner. To be a Christian steward is to commit to a lifestyle that accepts this special relationship with God.
God created the universe. It is impossible for a person to understand their role as a Christian steward without acknowledging God's ownership. As part of God's creation, humanity has been given the ability to choose to be faithful or to rebel against God, thus choosing to be a faithful or rebellious steward.

While stewardship relates closely with the use of one's possessions, it actually involves the total life of an individual; the investment of his/her time and influence; the way he/she relates to the resources of the created world; the way that one lives their life in relationship to God, the Creator; as well as one's involvement in sharing the gospel with the world.

A local church is charged with the task of communicating with its people the proper understanding of stewardship and teaching responsibility that is to become a part of the lifestyle of a Christian at all levels of life.

**Annual Budget**

Financial Stewardship is not only a personal responsibility but also the responsibility of the church. As individuals contribute to the work of the Church, they need the assurance that their giving is received and distributed appropriately by the financial officers who have been instilled with the responsibility of caring for the church's finances.

An annual budget is necessary to provide guidelines for planned expenditures that are based upon expected income. The key word here is "planned." A budget allows the church officers to plan the projected expenses for the year and to make decisions based upon the plan. A budget not only allows a congregation to spend wisely but also provides the opportunity to plan for needed ministry issues and to see that funding is made available. Otherwise, vision may be stifled because of the uncertainty of the needed financial support.

Churches that operate without a budget usually find that they are operating in a "hand to mouth" or emergency mode. A budget allows persons who have been given proper authority to operate within the scope of their budget without having to gain approval for each expenditure. The budget also places the responsibility for the expenditures of the church in the hands of a group of persons, a task usually left to the treasurer where there is no budget.

**Financial Officers**

Churches should select/elect qualified individuals to handle their financial concerns. If at all possible, the person given this responsibility should have knowledge of business procedures and be skilled in keeping financial records. Payroll, tax payments, reports to government agencies, etc. are all necessary concerns which must be given proper attention by the person charged with this responsibility. This person also should keep current with new directives that come from government agencies.
A church should make certain that their financial officers are bonded and that their records are audited annually. This protection not only serves the church, but protects the financial officer(s).

**Tithing**

The Churches of God, General Conference support the act of tithing. Tithing is the act of giving to God one-tenth of an individual's income. This giving is done to support the various ministries of the church. Offerings are considered to be giving above the scripturally mandated tithe.

Many in the church would teach "Storehouse Tithing" which believes that it is the obligation of church members to give to God through the local church and the tithe should not be given elsewhere. Others would agree that giving of the tithe to God may happen outside the boundaries of the local church as long as God's work is receiving the gift.

Generally speaking, it is the understanding of the Church that tithing is being obedient to God; it prospers the church; it provides money to do ministry/win souls; it causes the tither to grow spiritually; and, ultimately, it prospers the tither financially. However, tithing is not to be considered as a means of receiving the blessing of God. The attitude of the giver in presenting their gift is basic to the act of tithing.

**Denominational Giving**

The General Conference of the Churches of God depends upon the giving of the local Regions/Conferences to fund the ministries of the Denomination. The giving of an individual supports the local church which gives to the local Region/Conference which, in turn, gives to the General Conference.

Regions/Conferences are asked to support the General Conference at a level that provides income to support the Cooperative ministries of the churches in the Denomination. Cooperative ministries include the work of the General Conference Administrative Council, funding the work of the administrative office, Church Planting efforts on the Denominational level, certain youth and family ministries, certain cross-cultural ministries, as well as other areas of ministries including communications and support of Winebrenner Theological Seminary.

Designated giving is giving above the Cooperative level and is done to support particular designated areas of ministry that the Denomination has chosen to do together. Support of individual missionaries, church planters, ACTS teams, certain youth educational ministries, certain ministries to the University of Findlay and Winebrenner Theological Seminary, as well as other designated projects of the church are funded through designated giving from Regions/Conferences, churches and individuals.
The Holding and Deeding of Property

The deeds for church property should be carefully drawn up in accordance with the law of the state in which the property is located and in conformity with the constitutional provisions of the Churches of God, General Conference.

The latter provision is as important as the first. Secular lawyers, while versed in the law, are not always knowledgeable as to the polity of church bodies. In case of controversy, the church property may lack the protection afforded by the discipline of the church, if such provisions have not been included in the legal document.

All property should be deeded to the elders or trustees, in trust for the church, or to the church corporation, if incorporated.

For the protection of the total church and in keeping faith with the original chartering relationship with the Churches of God, General Conference and the respective local conference, a revision clause should be included in the deed; i.e., "In case the church shall become extinct or cease to maintain an organization in harmony with the doctrines, customs, and polity of the Churches of God, General Conference the property shall revert to the (local conference) of the Churches of God, General Conference and should that conference no longer exist or cease to exist, it shall revert to the General Conference of the Churches of God." However, it should be subject to any lawful existing mortgage, conveyance trust, bequest, annuity made by said church prior to the arising of an occasion for such reverter.

The absence of such a reversion clause can lead to the takeover of the property by those not in harmony with the Churches of God, General Conference or worse, a group subversive of the Christian faith.

An action by the conference should be taken authorizing the president, clerk or chief executive to provide certification for the protection of a mortgagee or grantor, should the occasion arise for the reversion clause to be in effect.

Deeds should be registered and recorded directly upon their execution. A copy of the deed should be placed with the conference office or clerk for the purpose of record.

Withdrawal of a Church

INTRODUCTION

This document is presented for the express purpose and intention of maintaining and enhancing the harmony, unity, and peace (John 17:20-24) within the body of Christ, expressly within the Churches of God, General Conference, her conferences and congregations. To that end, the Churches of God, General Conference reaffirms that the Bible is our only authoritative rule of faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
We also reaffirm, based upon foundational biblical principles, that “the government and polity of the Churches of God is representative and presbyterian in character” (Art. 17.03, Churches of God Constitution).

Furthermore, we reaffirm that our Presbyterial Polity is adequately set in order for the promotion of doctrinal purity, the protection of local congregations, and the wholeness of the Churches of God, General Conference by addressing various issues including but not limited to:

sound theology;

three tier structure of representation;

issuance of ministerial credentials;

pastoral assignment and transfer process;

matters pertaining to property.

Lastly, it is our expressed desire to protect the local church from the remote possibility that this denomination would stray from its foundational biblical teachings. With this being said, we have developed this document to address the issue of property ownership and reversion. As it relates to this matter, we also take into consideration the following principles:

**Our Witness in the Church and Our Communities**

The Holy Scriptures command us to be good stewards of God’s resources and to be good witnesses in our community (1 Peter 4:10). We are to do all things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). We are to conduct our business with integrity as we establish a good reputation both in and out of the church (1 Timothy 3:7). Furthermore, God’s law is greater than humanity’s and the ministry of grace is more effectual than expressed authoritarianism (1 Corinthians 12:9).

**Lawsuits among Christians**

We uphold the biblical precepts that lawsuits are harmful to Christian witness, denominational endeavor and local ministry. In general, the use of legal recourse to resolve differences within the church will hinder its testimony. It is therefore our conviction that we should avoid such lawsuits by endeavoring to settle disputes within the body of Christ, as instructed by the Holy Scriptures (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

**The Relationship between the Churches of God and Her Local Churches**
The relationship between the Churches of God, General Conference and her local churches is one of mutual consent and support. Our spiritual and organizational relationship endows us with strength by adopting a system for cooperative effort. Unfortunately, even in the best relationships, misunderstandings can lead to a fracture in that relationship. In such cases, our first priority is to seek healing through reconciliation (Matthew 5:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5.19). However, because of human frailty, not all attempts for reconciliation are successful. In some cases fractured relationships may ultimately lead to a local church desiring to disassociate with the Churches of God, General Conference.

The procedure set forth in this document has been developed to protect the local congregation as well as the Churches of God, General Conference. It will promote the resolution of differences without resorting to lawsuits. This process seeks reconciliation first. Denominational representatives will have an opportunity to participate with a local congregation. Together they shall investigate charges from which a church may seek disassociation from the Churches of God, General Conference. In doing so, we hope to restore relationship and convince against disassociation. This process also allows for a gracious withdrawal of the local congregation as a last resort. In such case, being gracious provides an environment for potential fellowship and future reconciliation.

This process is applicable only to those who perceive theological or doctrinal disparity with the ministries of the Churches of God, General Conference. This will provide recourse to those in seemingly irreparable disunity and also provide the discipline of denominational self-examination.

It is our desire to work together in spiritual unity with all of God’s people as was demonstrated by the apostles and the early church fathers and to remain obedient to the commands of our Lord. We pray that we may fulfill the mission of the Churches of God, General Conference by making more and better disciples, and more importantly, demonstrating lives that reflect the glory of God and the grace of His Son Jesus Christ.

WITHDRAWAL PROCESS

Any local congregation considering the withdrawal from the Churches of God, General Conference or her conferences shall be guided by the following process:

1. Prior to calling a congregational meeting for the purpose of taking any action leading to withdrawal from the Churches of God, General Conference, the official local church leadership shall notify its local conference in writing of its intention to call such a meeting and provide written grounds for its intention.
2. The local conference, through representative(s) appointed for such purpose, shall respond to and meet with the official local church leadership within a period not to exceed six (6) weeks after receipt of the written notification. The purpose of this meeting is to hear the issues of concern and to seek timely reconciliation. Subsequent meetings may be called by mutual consent.

3. If the official local church leadership still desires to withdraw, said leadership will issue a written call for a congregational meeting in accordance with the local church’s constitution and bylaws. The written call shall contain the local church leadership’s recommendation to withdraw and grounds supporting such recommendation. It will also contain the local conference’s response in writing. Furthermore, the local church shall notify the local conference officials of any and all congregational meetings that are called to discuss withdrawal and allow them to participate.

4. During the congregational meetings, conference officials will be given ample opportunity to address the congregation and present their response and position. They will also be permitted to speak prior to any vote for withdrawal being taken.

5. Any vote for withdrawal will require an 80% affirmation of the voting members present at a duly convened congregational meeting. Said voting will be done by confidential written ballot. Local conference officials may observe the voting process and tabulation. They will also be permitted to inspect the ballots for written comments.

6. If the vote of the congregation favors withdrawal by the required 80%, the official local church leadership shall call an additional congregational meeting to be held not less than six (6) months in the future. During this period of time, all parties shall commit to fasting and prayer regarding the potential withdrawal.

7. At the subsequent congregational meeting an affirmation ballot will be presented. If said ballot reaffirms the previous action to withdrawal by an 80% affirmation of the voting members present, the following actions will be taken in a timely manner:

   a. The local church and the local conference officials will contact their respective attorneys to prepare necessary documents and to gather and disburse any settlements that may apply.

   b. The local conference officials will then present the appropriate documents which will release all denominational claims on the local church property. The local church will provide the appropriate documents that indicate they have satisfied any outstanding financial obligation to the local conference, the General Conference, or their related agencies.
c. Upon completion of this process, the formal severance of this church from the Churches of God, General Conference shall be complete. All parties will be released from any and all liabilities and obligations to the other.

8. During the time of potential withdrawal, the local church shall honor its obligations to the local conference, General Conference and their related agencies (i.e. tithing, mortgage payments, etc.)

9. Individual members of the local church who wish to remain in fellowship with the Churches of God, General Conference, will be placed on a roll and the local conference will arrange for the oversight of those continuing members.

10. If either vote is not satisfied by the 80% requirement for withdrawal, the local church and the local conference will begin a process of reconciliation.

In the event the local church fails to comply with the terms and conditions of this Withdrawal Process, or fails to obtain the required 80% affirmative vote for withdrawal, then the Churches of God, General Conference (and the intermediate judicatory or conference having jurisdiction) shall retain and assert all of its rights, title and interest in and to the local church property as provided in the Constitution of the Churches of God, General Conference.