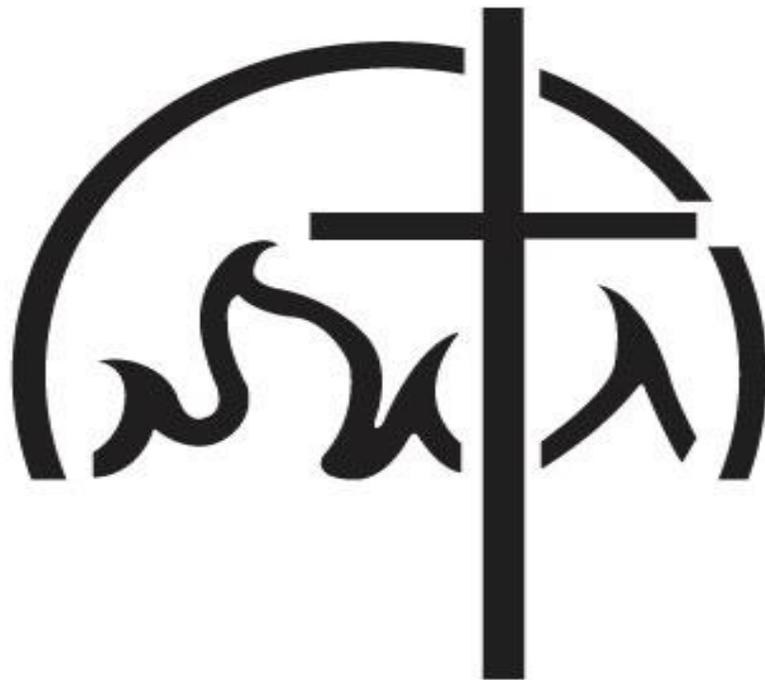


WE BELIEVE



Adopted July 2013 by 54th Session of General Conference

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INTRODUCTION

This *We Believe* document is a teaching tool designed to inform all interested parties concerning the faith as commonly believed in the Churches of God, General Conference. Within *We Believe* certain teachings could be defined as core while others are more descriptive of doctrinal distinctiveness when it comes to understanding and interpreting the biblical text. For example: one would not be considered a Christian if they did not confess Jesus as Lord, or believe in his atoning work at Calvary and his resurrection (Romans 10:9). On the other hand, the precise details of his return are open to discussion.

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

The Churches of God, General Conference does not object to publishing, for information, what it believes and practices or to studying historic creeds for personal interest, but it does not create any such statement or receive any historic creed as an authority or test of fellowship. Jesus Christ alone is Lord of the conscience and his Word alone can rightfully connect people to the truth. There may be God-ordained helps to understand the Bible—such as experience (John 9:24-25), Christian community (Acts 17:10-11), reason (Isaiah 1:18), and sacred history (Hebrews 11-12:1)—but all of these things are fallible and none of them is an authority. Only what is clearly taught in the Bible is necessary for salvation. The Bible alone sets the standard for general Christian principles and fellowship within the Churches of God.

At the centennial celebration in 1925, the General Eldership approved a summary statement of faith based on Winebrenner's 1844 declaration but focused strictly on doctrinal matters. Fifty years later in 1975, the General Conference approved a condensed version of the 1925 statement. (See Appendix A for copies of these three statements.) Although these various declarations provide a succinct statement of belief for the Churches of God, General Conference, there still remains the need for a handbook to help those seeking more information. To this end the General Conference provided its churches and pastors with a brief view of *The Distinctive Doctrines of the Churches of God in North America*. Commonly known among the churches as "the yellow book," it served the Church for nearly three decades beginning in the 1930s. Then in 1959 the General Eldership approved a new exposition in the *Teachings and Practices of the Churches of God*. That Bible-based booklet (called "the green book") set forth in order things most surely believed among us.

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

From its formation, the Churches of God stressed the importance of unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things. The Church seeks to uphold biblical truth while respecting personal freedom. As such *We Believe* is not intended as the final word on the faith and practice of the Churches of God. Only God’s Word can do that and one day this current edition will likely be revised. Nor is it intended as a litmus test for fellowship or a proscription for ministry as there is diversity of thought and practice across the body on several items discussed herein. It needs to be remembered that this document is a “centered set” delineating the mainstream of the Churches of God and not a “bounded set” prescribing what is required of all.

The Churches of God, General Conference does not endorse any particular translation of the Scriptures. The statement on translations in the section on "The Bible" expresses the sense of the Church. The committee of writers contributing to this document used translations, not paraphrases, that best clarify and elucidate.

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

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

The Administrative Council extends deep appreciation to representatives from local conferences, Winebrenner Theological Seminary, the CGGC Executive Director and Regional Directors as well as the Associates in Ministry, writers of various sections and drafts, those who contributed editorial skills and many who shared input to prepare this document. Their attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and their love for God’s Church are evident in these pages. We particularly thank the persons whose names appear in appendix B of this document for their help over the past several years while the writing and rewriting process continued. Our prayer is that their work may serve the Church and the inquiring public well in the years to come. May Jesus Christ be praised!

CGGC SUMMARY STATEMENT OF FAITH

- We believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
- We believe in one God, eternally existent in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one in essence and community.
- We believe in God the Father, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth.
- We believe that Jesus Christ our Lord is the Word made flesh – fully God and fully man. We believe he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, was crucified, died and was buried, rose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven.
- We believe in the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, enables the believer to live a holy life, comforts, teaches, and bestows spiritual gifts.
- We believe humanity is created in the image of God, has fallen into sin, and can be born again by the Spirit, justified freely by grace, and saved through the atoning work of Jesus Christ alone.
- We believe that the Church is the body of Christ, the people of God, whose mission is to make disciples of all nations and to be salt and light in the world.
- We believe baptism, the Lord's supper, and footwashing to be ordinances of the Church.
- We believe in the return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, everlasting life, and the new heavens and new earth.

GOD

We believe in God.

God is eternal.¹ God is the beginning of all that is (Genesis 1:1).

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

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

God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6-7). What God has promised, what he has set as standards for life and goodness, are not open to being rewritten or changed (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17). This is not only a further reflection of God's own identity as "I AM" – transcendent³ of our reality – but also a benefit to us that God is not impulsive or variable with his judgments⁴ (Romans 2:1-13).

We believe God is three persons but one God.

This is also known as the doctrine of the Godhead, or the Tri-unity of God (sometimes called "Trinity"⁵).

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 says, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one." This passage indicates that God is singularly God – totally undivided. This means God alone is God and the only one that his people should listen to, and that he exists in completeness and unity within himself.

We believe that God has revealed himself as three persons, with complete identities and personalities, but wholly submitted to one another and indivisibly⁶ unified. Those three persons are:

The Father – creator/founder, (Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 9:6) by whom all creation was conceived and finds its purpose.

Son (Jesus) – the Word. Creation was formed by the Word the Father spoke. The Son (Word) brings the Father's plans into material creation, (Genesis 1:3; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-3, 10:30; Hebrews 1:1-3). Through him all things came to be, and by him the plans of God are fulfilled.

Holy Spirit – the mysterious presence of God, often called "the Holy Ghost" or the "Spirit of God." Genesis 1:2 gives a picture that describes the Spirit moving in and through creation, assembling and empowering⁷ the created parts. This role is depicted throughout Scripture as we see the Spirit interweaving the will/purpose of God in creation and revealing who Jesus Christ is (Genesis 1:1-2; John 14:26, 16:7-13; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12). The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ because of the co-equal nature of the persons of the Godhead. Through the Spirit we receive God's comfort, counsel, power, special gifting to build up the Church, and are led into all Truth.

In Matthew 3:16-17 we see all three persons of God together at Jesus' baptism⁸ which was done to fulfill righteousness⁹ – aligning the work God was going to do through Jesus to the same pattern God set for the rest of humanity.

Yet there is only one God (1 Corinthians 8:4b-6). God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Father is God. Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit is God (Ephesians 4:3-6).

We believe God is both unknowable and knowable.

God is greater than our minds can comprehend, and exists beyond our ability to perceive. God also has revealed himself, and has chosen to do so in direct relationship to people (Psalm 19; Romans 1:20, 1 John 4:12). God is the Creator and Sustainer¹⁰ of all that exists. God is love (1 John 1:1-3). He cares in a personal way about each person (Romans 5:8). God is actively involved presently in creation. The call of Abraham, the Exodus of Israel, the ministry of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit all demonstrate his ongoing involvement in relationship to creation and humanity (2 Peter 1:3-4; Genesis 12-15; Exodus; Matthew 3:16-17; Acts 2; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

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

God is omniscient (all-knowing). God has infinite knowledge. God is the source of all truth. "Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5; also Isaiah 40:26; Hebrews 4:13).

God is omnipotent (all powerful). "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26; also Psalm 107; Isaiah 26:4; Revelation 19:6).

God is omnipresent (all present). God's presence is infinite—everywhere, always (Psalm 139:7-12).

We believe in the holiness of God.

To be holy means to be separated from and opposed to evil – committed to purity and wholeness. "For I am the Lord your God; consecrate¹¹ yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). God is holy, requiring and offering to train humanity in being holy (Proverbs 8:13; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 1:15-16; James 1:13; 3 John 1:11).

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

God is revealed through creation. God is distinctly other than creation and transcends it, but the orderliness and majesty of creation declare God's existence, creativity, and glory¹² (Isaiah 6:3).

God is revealed through human history – first through Israel's history. God initiated a promise to Abraham, gave commands/laws to Moses for justice¹³ and relationship, called leaders and prophets¹⁴ to guide society, delivered Israel from various captivities, and gave specific Scriptures to be remembered/written – in order to share his will and desire for involvement and relationship with people.

God is revealed most clearly through Jesus Christ. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus came to acquaint us more fully with God. To know God we must know Jesus Christ – his life, teachings, ministry,

death, and resurrection. From Jesus we have learned that God is a just but compassionate Father.

God is revealed through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps verify that Jesus is God (John 16:13-15). It is the Holy Spirit who comes to live in relationship with the conscience¹⁵ and physical life of those who follow Jesus – as counselor, comforter, empowerer, teacher, guide, revealer of all truth (Zechariah 7:12; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1). It is by this fellowship¹⁶ with the Spirit that we gain insight into God's will, intentions, character and nature (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

God is revealed through the Church,¹⁷ The Church is meant to reflect and demonstrate God's character and nature (Ephesians 3:10-12).

God is revealed through the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-16). (See "BIBLE" for more information.)

THE FATHER

We believe the FATHER is the initiator¹⁸ of all creation.

All creation was conceived and finds its purpose in him (Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 9:6).

We believe the Father is first among equals within the Godhead.

The unity and oneness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are clear in the Bible and it is inconsistent to see any member of the Godhead as “superior.” Yet we do see that Jesus demonstrated constant submission¹⁹ to his Father in heaven, and clearly states that he only does what he sees the Father doing or commanding him to do (Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 23:46; John 5:19, 30; 10:29; 14:31). And The Holy Spirit also obeys the Father and causes us to also look to the Father as we follow Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15-16; John 14:26).

We Believe the Father is sovereign over all creation.

“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45 NIV; also Matthew 6:26, 10:29; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6).

We believe The Father is the ultimate forgiver and is merciful.²⁰

“If you forgive men... your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive...your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15; also Luke 6:36, 23:34).

We Believe the Father is the initiator in our relationship with Christ.

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44; also John 6:65; 8:28, 42; 14:16, 26; Colossians 1:12; I John 4:14).

We believe the Father is the ultimate giver of all that is good and perfect.

“Every good and perfect gift is from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17; also Ephesians 1:3, 5:20).

We Believe the Father is glorified (declared good and true) when we live and share God’s Kingdom²¹ with others.

As we follow Jesus Christ and live according to His Word, we glorify God and show others the love and character of God (Matthew 5:16; John 15:8; John 17:5-26).

We Believe the Father will determine the time and place, and the outcomes of the End Times.

Jesus himself said that only the Father knows when heaven and earth will pass away and the end will come (Matthew 24:35-36). And we see the Father seated on the throne (a place of authority) holding the “book with the seven seals” (the plan for the end times) that Jesus will use to bring about the Last Things (Revelation 5:7). (See “LAST THINGS” for more information.)

JESUS CHRIST

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

As the second person of the Godhead, Jesus has always existed, enjoying the love of the Father from “before the creation of the world” (John 17; John 1:1). Along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus took an active role in the making of our world (Colossians 1:16).

We believe Jesus is one with the Father, and is also fully God.

Even as a human, Jesus continued to be divine and part of the Godhead (John 10:30). Jesus is God, not a hybrid, not a special agent on task, not a reflection, and not a product of God. Jesus is of the same essence, of the same substance as the Father (John 14: 9-10). The Son makes known, or unveils, the Father, enabling us to rightly and truly know and encounter God as He truly is (John 1:18; Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27).

We believe Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s redemptive²² promise in the Scriptures.

The Bible states that all of creation looks forward to God’s ultimate act of restoration in Jesus (Isaiah 65:17-18, 25; Romans 8:19). Jesus is the promised Savior and the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17). The Bible is a reliable and comprehensive witness to the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27).

We believe Jesus took on human flesh, and is fully human.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and was flesh and blood like us (Matthew 1:20-23; John 1:14). Jesus became human in order to make himself knowable to us, to offer himself as an acceptable sacrifice on our behalf, and to represent us before the Father (Hebrews 2:17).

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

As our Savior and high priest,²³ Jesus assumed our broken humanity in order to redeem, restore, and to offer it to the Father (Hebrews 3:1). In his human flesh he lived a perfect life of obedience, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves (Hebrews 4:15).

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

Jesus displayed the deep love of God as, in trusting obedience to the Father, he willingly laid down his life in our place, dying the death we deserved – on the cross. In doing so, Jesus took away our sin and broke death’s hold on us forevermore (Colossians 1:22-23). He established a new and everlasting covenant²⁴ between God and humankind (2 Corinthians 5:21). He now enables us to share in his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit - and know the love of God (John 15:9; 16:5-15; Ephesians 3:14-19; 1 John 4:16).

We believe Jesus was raised victoriously from the dead.

The Father raised Jesus from the dead (Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-18; Acts 2:32). When Jesus rose from the dead, he broke forevermore the power of death, and removed the permanence of its sting (John 11: 25-26). Jesus now

provides a certain hope that we who trust in him will also one day be raised bodily like him to new and everlasting life (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

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

Jesus ascended to the Father (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11). Jesus, in his resurrected human body, represents us to the Father (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, continues to be present and active in the ministry of his body, the Church (John 16:7; Acts 2).

We believe Jesus is Lord and Savior.

Jesus, having triumphed over sin and death, is now exalted as Lord of all (Acts 4:12). As the one mediator²⁵ between God and man, God's one and only Son, he alone has access to the Father, and no one can come to the Father except by him (John 14:6). Jesus continues His ongoing ministry until the end of the age, when he will return to judge the living and the dead (Matthew 28:20; Acts 10:42-43). Jesus continues his work of revealing the fullness of God's wisdom through the Church to the authorities of this world and the spiritual realms (Romans 3:22-26; Ephesians 3:10-11).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is God.

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

The Holy Spirit teaches, commissions, directs, intercedes,²⁶ and feels (John 14:26, Acts 13:2-4, Acts 16:6-7, Romans 8:26-27, Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30).

We believe the Holy Spirit has always been engaged in God's work.

The Spirit of God was active at creation, moving upon the face of the waters and creating human beings (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4). The Spirit of God enabled Bezaleel to build the tabernacle, and equipped special people to be prophets, judges, or kings (Exodus 31:3; Ezekiel 37:1; Judges 3:10; 2 Samuel 23:2). God promised the Israelites that "I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring" (Isaiah 44:3).

The Holy Spirit was also instrumental in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35). The Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22) and led him into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan (Luke 4:1). In the power of that same Spirit (Luke 4:14), the Savior commenced and completed his ministry of reconciliation,²⁷ casting out demons²⁸ by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28) and promising to send the Counselor, the Spirit of truth (John 15:26).

We believe the Holy Spirit revealed himself in a new way on the day of Pentecost.²⁹

On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born (Acts 2:1). The Holy Spirit, appearing as "a rushing mighty wind" and "tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:2-3), began a new ministry of sanctification³⁰ – setting people apart to be the Church. This event was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and of the promise given by Jesus (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:33).

We believe the Holy Spirit can be known and experienced.

We receive the Holy Spirit from God when we choose to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Acts 2:38-39). When we choose to live in Jesus, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to give spiritual rebirth, regeneration,³¹ indwelling of the Holy Spirit, entrance into the kingdom of God, and immersion into the body of Christ (John 3:3-6; Titus 3:5-6; Acts 2:38-39; John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). This is what John the Baptist meant when he said that Jesus "... will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33; also John 1:29-34). This baptism of the Spirit³² is experienced by every Christian (1 Corinthians 12:13).

To bring persons to accept this relationship with God through Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts persons of their sin, of Christ's righteousness, and of judgment on evil (John 16:8-11).

We believe the Holy Spirit endows³³ the followers of Christ with the unity of the Spirit.

The "unity of the Spirit" is a special communion³⁴ that exists in the fellowship of persons who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Ephesians 4:3). In that

relationship God's love flows from believer to believer, uniting in purpose and mission as one body, one family, the Church (Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 John 4:13-21).

We believe the Holy Spirit enables believers to grow spiritually.

God gives abundant life to his people, by his Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). The Holy Spirit works in the lives of individual believers, giving guidance, instruction, and power for the fullness of life that Jesus promised (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). As the Holy Spirit does this he reveals and brings glory to Jesus Christ (John 16:13-15).

We believe the filling of the Holy Spirit is ongoing, present, and active in the lives of believers.

A believer is entrusted with the Holy Spirit at the time of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, yet there is a need to let the Holy Spirit continually work and fill them. This ongoing filling continues to equip with gifts, empower, bring about the evidence/fruit of the Spirit, and grow us to be filled with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:14-19; John 14:17; Ephesians 5:18; Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14; 1 John 2:27).

We believe the Holy Spirit dispenses spiritual gifts³⁵ for the building up of the Church.

The Holy Spirit works in the collective body of Christ, the Church. According to his wisdom and will, spiritual gifts are distributed among Christians for the building up of the Church (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 25-31; Ephesians 4:11 -13). The Spirit knows what gifts are needed and which persons should receive them. These gifts come as the Holy Spirit chooses for the good of the Church (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

For this reason, the Churches of God encourages its members to exercise faith and submission in discovering the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit bestows upon each one. We trust the Holy Spirit to know what the Church needs and which members should be used to supply those needs. One Christian's gifts should not be considered higher or lower than another's (1 Corinthians 12:6, 18, 25; 1 Corinthians 14:39). The body of Christ grows and holds together as Christians discover and exercise their spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:16).

We believe the fruit of the Spirit is the essential evidence of a believer's filling with the Holy Spirit.

At work in Jesus' followers, the Holy Spirit's power produces life-building fruit that makes them effective witnesses before the watching world. This fruit is the essential evidence of the presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer over and above any gifting or ability (Matthew 7:16; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13; Galatians 5:22-23).

THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible is the inspired,³⁶ infallible³⁷ authority,³⁸ the Word of God, our only rule for following Jesus in every aspect of our life.

There may be God-ordained helps for us to understand the Bible—such as experience (John 9:24-25), Christian community (Acts 17:10-11), reason (Isaiah 1:18), and sacred history (Hebrews 11-12:1), but all of these things are fallible³⁹ and none of them is an authority. Only what is clearly taught in the Bible is necessary for salvation⁴⁰ and for holy living. The Bible alone can set the standard for general Christian principles and fellowship in our churches.

The New Testament writers make it clear that scripture is the source of spiritual life and strength for the Christian (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12). These and other scriptures make it clear that we need no other authority or creed⁴¹ than the Bible. It is the final and all-sufficient declaration in belief, morals and activity for the Church and the Christian. We do not object to publishing, for information, what we believe and practice or to studying historic creeds for personal interest, but we do not create any such statement or receive any historic creed as an authority or test of fellowship.

Inspired of God or "*God-breathed*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17) means the Holy Spirit lifted the understanding of the speakers and writers above human limitations to give the Scriptures divine authority (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

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

The Bible reflects the culture⁴² and environment of the writers as they studied and wrote. God was guiding in such a way that the written truth was his Word (2 Peter 1:20, 21; Jude 3). It is thus the infallible authority in everything Christians believe and do.

The Bible is made up of 66 separate books written across many centuries. It was written by various individuals who spoke different languages and who came from a variety of economic and social situations. Yet incredibly, these very diverse authors declare the same God, thus revealing the hand of God in both its inspiration and preservation through time.

The Bible is comprised of 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Each was inspired by God and all were brought together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to form what is called the canon⁴³ of Holy Scripture, the Bible. The Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. affirmed those 39 books recognized as the sacred Word given first to the Israelites. The Council of Carthage in 419 A.D. affirmed the 27 books of the New Testament. These church leaders studied the books carefully for specific internal evidence of inspiration. They also examined the external evidence for their apostolic⁴⁴ and prophetic authenticity, following specific criteria by which a book claiming to be Scripture either authenticated or disqualified itself.

Consequently these councils did not vote on these books with the majority vote winning, but rather discerned, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which books already carried the stamp of the Spirit's inspiration, and which did not. We recognize with the early Church the Bible as genuine and authentic writings with prophetic and apostolic authority, God's inspired Word. Thus, we believe that these 66 books together are the Word of God.

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

A great drama unfolds to us in the pages of the Bible as we see the Creation (Genesis 1-2), the Fall (Genesis 3), and the redemption of humanity (John 3:17) parallel with the life (John 1:14), death (Mark 15), and resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28). We see the Creation, despite its original splendor and perfection, now suffering a fallen state⁴⁵ because of human sin (Romans 8:19-22). We see God, because of his great love and mercy, sending prophets and establishing a corrective system to call people to him and to reveal his character and purposes (Exodus 34:5-7; Hebrews 1:1). We see God sending Christ, the only begotten⁴⁶ Son (John 3:16), to teach and exemplify⁴⁷ love and truth (Philippians 2:5-7; Acts 10:38), die an atoning⁴⁸ death (1 John 2:2), be resurrected from the dead, abolish⁴⁹ death (1 Corinthians 15:3-6), and ascend to Heaven to be glorified (Acts 1:9-11). We see our call to participate in this redemptive process (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Philippians 2:12-13) and recognize that a day has been appointed when he will bodily return and complete the already commenced Kingdom where he will reign as Lord (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We believe proper interpretation⁵⁰ of the Bible comes from the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ contained in the Bible is entrusted to the Church to be proclaimed throughout the world (Acts 1:8). The Church is the Body of Christ under his headship and guided by the Holy Spirit. The unity of that body is vital to the effective proclamation of God's Word. Therefore, we understand that the interpretation of Scripture under the direction of the Holy Spirit is guided by the collective understanding of the body (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 3:1, 2).

The Bible is not to be used as a collection of proof-texts, nor is it designed to instruct us by isolated passages, which, torn from their original context, give us no clear guidance; rather when the Bible is read and interpreted as a whole it gives us a spiritual sensitivity to regulate our thoughts and feelings, and thereby to influence and direct our theology⁵¹ and conduct (Acts 2:42; 17:10-11).

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

As the Holy Spirit was active in the inspiration, canonicity and preservation of the Bible and remains active in the interpretation of it, so the Spirit also works in applying the Bible to the life of the believer and the Church. Jesus prayed for this (John 17:17) and promised the Holy Spirit to guide his followers with truth and knowledge (John 16:13-15). Consequently we can expect the Holy Spirit to work, not just in our understanding as we read the Bible; but to use it as one of the instruments, in our daily walk, to transform⁵² us into the likeness of Christ. The apostle says that the Word of God is to dwell richly in us. The believer who studies the Bible in a humble dependence on God will treasure up the doctrines, precepts,⁵³ promises, examples, and exhortations⁵⁴ of the Bible in their minds. They will acquire from the Holy Spirit a spiritual "taste," which enables them to perceive the right and wrong path in the particular situations of their lives with a sharp degree of precision, much like a trained musical ear can judge good or bad sounds imperceptible⁵⁵ to the untrained ear. As God uses the Bible in our daily walk, we are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in the heart, and by a concern for the glory of God, which becomes our great passion.

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

Translations into numerous languages have given many people the opportunity to read the Bible in their dialects. Changes in language and new archeological⁵⁶ discoveries of manuscripts closer to the originals make the translation of Scriptures a constant, continuing process. Each translation should be evaluated on clarity in communicating the Gospel. Translations from the best available manuscripts, primarily Hebrew and Greek, preserve the infallible authority of the Bible as God's Word. Translations prepared by a committee offer a system of checks and balances which may not be true in those prepared by an individual.

We believe that it is a sin to divide the Church over minor theoretical⁵⁷ distinctions regarding how the Bible was inspired by God.

For the purpose of interest we welcome and respect informed theories regarding the way in which God has inspired the prophets and apostles to produce the Holy Scriptures. But we very much regret divisions of the Church in the past caused by human speculation.

Technical distinctions, dogmatically⁵⁸ put forward, will not strengthen faith or assist in sanctification. The past has revealed that the only real fruit proceeding from asserting these "distinctions" is disharmony and division in the Body of Christ (Matthew 12:25; Ephesians 4:3; Titus 3:9-11). It may be observed in the case of nearly all of these divisions that authorities on both sides maintained that the Bible was the Christian standard for faith and practice.

Our identity in the Churches of God, General Conference is that of a Bible-only or *sola-scriptura* group. Our concern is and has been to know what the Bible says about itself. It is a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105) and is God-inspired, profitable and complete (2 Timothy 3:16), working co-extensively with the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26, 17:17) to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us for every good work.

HUMANITY

We believe that God made humanity in his image.

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

We believe that all people are created with equal value by God.

Galatians 3:26-29 (along with Genesis and much of Jesus’ ministry) makes it clear that in Jesus Christ ALL people are made equal in value, standing and personhood. God desires that all people have the opportunity to be in relationship with him (John 3:16). In both Old Testament and New – God can call anyone into service and ministry with him. And his call is not limited by sex, race, nationality, social station, or economic standing (Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:10; 4:10-16).

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

Humanity is like the rest of creation, which is made of material “stuff” that has been animated⁵⁹ by the power and Spirit of God. And like the rest of creation our physical bodies will wear out and we may die (Genesis 2:7). Humanity is the only creature made in the image of God, endowed with characteristics of God, but we are not God, nor do we have the potential to be God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 8; Psalm 113:5; Job 40-42:6).

In order to have God’s characteristics we must also be spiritual beings. Humanity is often described as having heart, mind, body, spirit, and soul⁶⁰ (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12-13). These physical and spiritual components are interwoven as a part of our unique design, and are expressed in our capacity for thought, will, and emotions.

The human soul is an eternal spiritual component (Matthew 10:28) of our nature that is designed for communion with God (Ezekiel 18:4). Our soul is designed to love and long for God (Psalm 42:1), and is restored by God (Psalm 23:3). Our soul can experience the brokenness of our existence and drift from our God-centered design (Psalm 42). Our soul can praise God (Psalm 103:1) and find fulfillment of longings (Psalm 37:4). Our souls find rest in living according to God’s purposes and plans (Matthew 11:25-30).

To be human is to be both physical and spiritual beings. Our eternal experience with God, after life here, will also involve material and spiritual existence. Our bodies will be made new when Christ returns to wrap up God’s plans for this world (Isaiah 26:19; 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We Believe humanity is a unique creation.

We believe that humankind is distinctly and uniquely made. Our design was in addition to and beyond what God did for the rest of creation. Although there are similarities among living things and our DNA⁶¹ structures, there is a designed complexity to humanity that was not intended for the rest of created things (Genesis 1; Psalm 8).

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

God intended humanity to be a reflection of him and for our work to resemble his work (Genesis 1:26). Part of humanity’s reflection of God’s character is the ability to create

and multiply. We were given the ability to multiply physically and spiritually. Procreation⁶² is one aspect of physical multiplication (Genesis 1:28). Add to this the unique abilities to create music, art, feats of engineering, etc. and we see that every aspect of human life and design was meant to reflect the image of God through the things we do (Ephesians 2:10). This responsibility to create physically comes through the authority God gave us to be stewards⁶³ of and workers in creation (Genesis 2:15). Men and women share in this responsibility individually and together (Genesis 2:21-23).

We see the spiritual responsibility to multiply in Jesus' command to make disciples - "as we are going" into all the world (Matthew 28:19). In every facet, moment, and season of life, multiplication is both an individual and a community responsibility as we reflect God's creative nature. This could be called our great co-mission with God, and is not possible apart from God. Personal discipleship of others and the planting of new churches are two significant ways we see this being applied in the church.

God's plan for those who follow Jesus is to conform them to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). Jesus' sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension restores humanity to a right relationship with God (John 14:23-26; 16:15; 17:20-26). This relationship transforms/conforms every aspect of our life and work to be like Christ (Romans 8:28-30). Humanity has a spiritual and physical connection with God since Jesus was resurrected and ascended to sit at the right hand of God with his physical body intact and renewed (John 20:24-30; Acts 1:9; Ephesians 2:6-7). It means our spiritual and physical lives will be transformed in relationship with God.

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

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

We believe that humanity is broken and separated from God by sin.⁶⁴

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

To sin is to "miss the mark." When we choose to go our own way apart from God we are sinning, missing God's plans/design for us, and it will lead us to death and destruction instead of the life God intended (Proverbs 14:12, Ephesians 2:10, Romans 2:13).

Every human being was designed to be in relationship with God and to have his guidance. All human beings are accountable for their choices. Apart from God, humanity's natural course is one of selfish desire and destruction (Romans 1:18-32). Unless we choose to let God intervene and lead our lives through Jesus Christ, we will continue to choose our own paths and be in sin and separation from God (Psalm 51:7-13; Romans 3:21-24; James 4:17). This leads not only to destructive consequences in

our lifetimes, but also to eternal separation from God – a second and eternal death (Revelation 21:8).

We believe humanity is given the freedom to choose.

Adam and Eve chose to disobey God in the Garden (Genesis 3). The issue of choice is always one of relationship, it's not that God was surprised by their choice, but rather the only way to have relationship was to have the choice not to have it. God indicates Adam and Eve could listen to the serpent⁶⁵ over and against God (Genesis 3:17).

We are free to live and think and act according to our own wills (Joshua 24:15; John 1:12; John 6:67). We have freedom to accept or reject God, to obey or disobey. However, God does set boundaries on human behavior. Freedom has always come in some framework of restrictions. One of those restrictions comes in the inability to nullify⁶⁶ the consequence of our negative decisions. Another would be when our freedom of choice would nullify a sovereign choice of God. We are not free to be God (Genesis 3:1-6). We are creature, not creator.

All persons experience inner tension between the desire to do right and the pressure to do wrong (Mark 10:17-22; Romans 14:12). We believe by God's grace⁶⁷ that people are free to choose to walk with Christ or not walk with Christ. Throughout their lifetimes, persons are free moral agents⁶⁸ with choice to walk or not walk with God by faith. What God does in regard to our salvation is God's decision in regard to our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7; Colossians 1:22-23; 2 Timothy 2:19). Grace remains the active power in providing salvation for God's people. Faith serves as the vehicle of delivery for that grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Believers are assured of their position with Christ. Relationship with God is not broken every time the Christian fails (1 John 2:1). Christians who confess their sin have the promise that God will forgive, restore, and cleanse them (1 John 1:9). God provides power for living a victorious life following Jesus. As Christians remain in Christ, he remains in them (Psalm 100:5; Matthew 28:20; John 15:4; Hebrews 13:5). We may forsake God. God will not forsake us. God will provide a way for freedom from sin, and work in us to live according to his will (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 2:13). God's people can approach life with a sense of victory.

Our choices of who/what to trust or have faith in will affect our eternal destiny (Habakkuk 2:4; Josh 22:15-20; Matt 5:17-21; John 3:16-18, John 15:5-6, Romans 3:21-24; Ephesians 2:8-10). The issue of choice and relationship with Jesus does not limit God's sovereignty and authority over creation, but speaks to his justice and his desire to love him freely – not by force.

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

With the power that raised Jesus from the dead, God transforms us from within (Romans 8:11, 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17). As we are conformed to the image of Christ, we discover more and more that in him is the only place we find peace (Ephesians 2:14). He urges us to grow ever deeper in our trust and understanding of him, and in the living out of our faith (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Jesus stated that his purpose was to come so that we “may have life and life to the full” (John 10:10). From scripture we have pictures that show us that a “full” life is both celebration and mourning, laughter and tears (Ecclesiastes 3). As Jesus works in us to heal, restore, and free us from our fallen and willful nature, he redeems every

experience and puts them in the perspective of God's grace (Romans 8). This healing work of Jesus in us, progresses until it is completed for all eternity. (Revelation 7:17; 21:4)

REGENERATION

We believe in the new birth, or regeneration.

The doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, is an essential teaching of the Churches of God. Jesus declared to Nicodemus that being born again (regenerated) is the basis for seeing and entering the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5, 7).

Regeneration is the radical transformation of an individual life from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Christ speaks in Matthew of the necessity of becoming like children (Matthew 18:1-4).

Christ teaches the necessity of entering a new way of life. Through regeneration a new life is made possible by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6). It involves a new relationship to God, a new relationship to others, and a new attitude toward the world.

We believe we must respond to God's offer.

This new life is a supernatural⁶⁹ change. It comes to the individual not by human efforts, but by the power and influence of God. This truth is expressed by the Evangelist John (John 1:12, 13). God does not give new life to someone who is not willing to be changed. God offers salvation, but does not force any person to receive it. God does not destroy or alter our choice to accept or reject this offer.

To experience regeneration, we must recognize our need for a new life, and that Jesus Christ is the only way to receive it (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This involves recognizing one's sinfulness, both sins we commit and sins of omission⁷⁰ (Romans 3:23; James 4:17) and turning to Jesus in true repentance and confession (Romans 10:9-13). All who do so will find new life in Christ (Romans 6:23).

Those who have matured to the point that they are capable of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are in a state of accountability before God and need regeneration. They are able both to understand their own personal sinfulness and to respond to God independently. Although often occurring in later childhood, this may vary according to the spiritual perceptiveness⁷¹ and mental capacity of the person.

We must recognize that our sin is separating us from God, and must be willing to repent. Repentance means willingness to confess sinfulness and to turn from a sinful life. With repentance comes God's forgiveness (Acts 3:19). Through a sincere response to the marvelous forgiving love of God, Christ comes into our lives and makes us new (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are truly born again.

JUSTIFICATION: A NEW STANDING BEFORE GOD

We believe that justification⁷² comes by faith in Christ and His atoning work, and not by works of the law, or merits of the individual.

We believe that a person is brought into a right relationship with God by the mediating work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Jesus restores the relationship between the believing sinner and God (1 Timothy 2:5). God declares the sinner righteous because of the sacrifice of Christ.

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

The Bible presents justification by faith in the person of Christ alone, and in His sacrificial work on the cross. Justification is a legal declaration that though guilty⁷³, a person is not held responsible because he has placed his or her faith in the atoning death of Christ, not his or her own righteousness. (Romans 4:5).

Justification is an act of God whereby He makes and declares the sinner righteous based on the shed blood of Christ. Justification occurs simultaneously⁷⁴ with regeneration (the giving of new life) and puts a sinner in right relation to God. The repentant and believing sinner is cleansed from sin, released from its penalty and is viewed as righteous before God. (Philippians 3:9).

This act of Justification is not based on human effort. (Galatians 2:16). It is a free gift and is given by the grace of God in response to the faith of the individual. All of the demands of the law are met in Christ (Romans 5:19).

We believe that Scripture reveals the following essential results which occur at Justification:

“Remission” means that the justified believer is freed from the demands of the law, because those demands have been satisfied in Christ. A person justified by grace is “set free,” or redeemed, by Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24). This is not just a pardon,⁷⁵ but a declaration that the sinner’s guilt is erased by God. The believer is forgiven and set free.

“Restoration” means that a person is now represented by Christ. His righteousness is now yours. Faith in Christ restores a person to perfection in the sight of God. It is as if the person never sinned. (Romans 5:1). God now accepts the justified believer as “righteous.”

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

This “new relationship” is based on an exchange of position. Christ took the place of the sinner. Judgment was pronounced at the Cross. Christ was crucified on our behalf. When a person believes in Jesus, he or she now stands in the righteousness of Christ, there is an exchange of position (2 Corinthians 5:21). At justification the believer is adopted into God’s family (Romans 8:15). All of the blessings God has for His children culminating⁷⁶ in the resurrection of the body, now belong to the believer (Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:23).

SANCTIFICATION: A LIFE SET APART

We believe sanctification is the shared work of God and the believer, bringing the whole of one's life in line with the will of God.

To sanctify anything is to declare that it is holy and belongs completely to God. The God-given ability to make one's lifestyle more Christ-like occurs through the relationship between the believer and the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:26; Galatians 5:22-23) and not through human effort (Galatians 3:3). Sanctification is a lifelong process, daily appropriated⁷⁷ through surrender of life to God. While sanctification is not complete in any given act, there may be experiences in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit that lead to greater yielding to God and holiness. Sanctification is not complete short of the life to come (1 John 3:2). Glorification⁷⁸ is the end of the process of sanctification (1 Corinthians 15:42-57, Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 3:1-17).

In the Old Testament, sanctification was primarily used to set apart places, days, seasons and objects of worship (Genesis 2:3; Leviticus 27:14; Exodus 19:23; 39:32-34). However, New Testament usage portrays a Savior who was so completely set apart to God that those who believe in him can also be sanctified (John 17:17-22). Sanctification then refers to the process of consecrating the regenerate persons that are called to be set apart (Romans 1:7).

Sanctification happens instantaneously⁷⁹ and simultaneously with regeneration (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 4:17). Sanctification is also progressive⁸⁰ as it is a continuing growth in grace, truth, and relationship with God (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 1:5-7). Sanctification is also complete in that all who have the indwelling Holy Spirit will be delivered completely from sin at glorification (see Last Things) as sons and daughters of God (Galatians 3:26-4:6).

Justification is God's imputed⁸¹ work on us; sanctification is God's imparted⁸² work in us. While justification refers to a change in status before God, sanctification refers to a change within one's being because of the relationship believers enjoy with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). This change in being begins at the time of regeneration when believers receive the Holy Spirit and is realized in a continual growth toward Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29-30). It could be said that sanctification is to regeneration what growth is to birth.

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

Holiness is a characteristic of God and should mark the Christian walk (1 Peter 1:15-16). This is a command, but also implies that believers are to choose to be holy. We continue to be free moral agents throughout the process of sanctification. Holiness does not mean sinless perfection, or that at some point our fallen nature is eradicated.⁸³ Sin and our fallen nature continue to be present with us throughout this life (Romans 7:17; Galatians 5:17). Yet God wants holy people and believers must deliberately decide to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit to be holy. Therefore, sanctification in the life of the believer is a life-long process of choosing to be controlled by the new nature through the direction of the Holy Spirit.

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

Followers of Christ depend on the power and help of the Holy Spirit to produce Christ's life in us (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:22-26). Holy living is the believer's privilege and responsibility because it will bring honor and glory to God.

THE CHURCH

We believe the Church is the Body of Christ.

The Church exists only because of the grace of God and the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It consists of all persons who accept Christ as personal Savior and Lord, leading a regenerate life. The Church is composed of all who have responded to the Holy Spirit's call through the saving love of Jesus Christ. The Church is often called the people of God. Christians are described as "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." (1 Peter 2:9). One of the significant images of the Church in the Scriptures is the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:4-16). The Church as the body of Christ is affirmed in Scripture (Romans 12:5).

All Christians are important to the effective working of the body of Christ, even though we may differ in spiritual gifts, in national origin, or in social standing. Even parts which seem weaker are indispensable.⁸⁴ The unity of the Body of Christ lies not in the sameness of its parts, but in its "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*" (Ephesians 4:5-6). No Christian can live apart from the body of Christ any more than a hand or a foot can live apart from the human body. Christ is *the head of the body* (Colossians 1:18). All true Christians respond to him as Lord. Those ruled by Christ recognize that their lives form God's temple and that he dwells within their fellowship (1 Corinthians 3:16).

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

We believe that the calling and gifting of God are the essential prerequisites⁸⁵ for service and leadership in the Church. The Apostle Paul makes a clear reference to all people being the same in relationship to their standing with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ there are no differences in regards to gender, culture, economy, or geo-political boundaries when it comes to salvation or service (Galatians 3:26-29).

We believe the New Testament provides a framework for all persons to serve Christ in the Church according to their giftedness and calling. This means that all people should be set free to serve as God directs and do so for his glory.

We believe the Church enjoys a special kind of fellowship.

The quality of life in the Church is best expressed by the term "fellowship." The New Testament word for fellowship, *koinonia*, suggests a special relationship rooted in the Christian's common fellowship with the Father through the Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; Philippians 2:1-4).

Common worship is an important factor in establishing and maintaining fellowship. Early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,⁸⁶ fellowship, the breaking of bread⁸⁷ and prayer (Acts 2:42). Christians are to come together to encourage one another, to help one another, to show love, to do good, and to bear one another's burdens (Hebrews 10:25; Galatians 6:2).

The Church in the New Testament is the household of faith and the family of God (Ephesians 2:19; Romans 12:10). The Ephesians are instructed to "*be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children*" (Ephesians 5:1). The relationship between a husband and wife is compared to the love between Christ and his Church (Ephesians

5:21-33). Christians are reminded that *"he who loves God should love his brother also"* (1 John 4:21).

We believe the purpose of the Church is to proclaim God's redemptive mission.⁸⁸

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

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

We believe Jesus chooses to minister his work of reconciliation and wholeness⁸⁹ primarily through his Body, the Church.

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to be actively engaged in his work of new creation through us, as we experience, proclaim, and demonstrate his love. God includes his new creation, the Church, in the process of calling and reconciling the world unto himself (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

As we carry the Gospel into the world, and demonstrate his love and grace in the reality of our lives, we create a loving context in which his reconciliation and re-creation can take place (Matthew 5:23-24). The Church, as a living expression of Christ's redemptive reality, can provide a rare opportunity in this world to experience God's unconditional love. As people are welcomed and accepted as they are, they can be listened to and affirmed as valuable and unique persons who were designed in the image of God. In relationship with the body of Christ, they can experience healing of heart and soul offered nowhere else (1 John 4:7-16). As such the Church through the Gospel must be committed to reconciliation between peoples across all divides, whether they are cultural, racial, economic, social, etc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Throughout its history, the Churches of God, General Conference, has maintained the importance of a strong doctrine of the Church, seeing it as basic to sound Christian theology. The Church's doctrines of regeneration, the ordinances,⁹⁰ church government, and church discipline⁹¹ are all affected by its doctrine of the Church and the high importance placed upon biblical principles.

From its inception, the Churches of God, General Conference, has maintained a high view of the Church. A thorough study of the Scriptures reveals that the name "Church of God" is the best biblical name for the Church (1 Corinthians 1:2 and others); that the presbyterial⁹² system of elders⁹³ (Acts 14:23) and deacons⁹⁴ (1 Timothy 3:10) is the biblical form of church government; and that the new birth through Jesus Christ is the only way of entering the Church (1 John 5:1-5).

THE ORDINANCES: SERVICES TO REMEMBER

We believe Christ has given the Church three divine ordinances.

The term "ordinance" refers to a practice or ceremony that is commanded to be observed. Under the Old Covenant, God directed his people to keep certain festivals⁹⁵ as a perpetual⁹⁶ memorial observance, a lasting ordinance (Exodus 12:14). From then until now, Israel continues to observe a number of celebratory feasts and rituals to commemorate⁹⁷ God's redemptive acts. In like manner the Church also observes services of remembrance to celebrate God's great act of redemption under the New Covenant through the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Israel was directed to keep its ordinances, it is incumbent⁹⁸ upon all Christians in every time and place to live up to Jesus' directive to observe the ordinances he established.

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

The three ordinances call to remembrance the full story of salvation in Jesus' coming, his passion,⁹⁹ and his ultimate glorification (Philippians 2:6-11). They memorialize Jesus Christ's mission, atonement, and resurrection. They also remind believers of their own call to service, their redemption, and their ultimate victory over sin and death through the Lord Jesus Christ. The following chart summarizes what constitutes an ordinance, giving the biblical foundations and showing what each teaches about Jesus and Christian living. The three ordinances complement and complete each other.

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

BAPTISM

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

Baptism is an ordinance of the Church and is essential for obedience to Christ's command. Jesus commissioned his followers to go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward grace. When we believe in and commit ourselves to following Christ, a fundamental¹⁰⁰ change takes place. We receive God's acceptance, forgiveness, and direction for living (2 Corinthians 5:17). Baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer's participation in that divine process (Romans 6:3-14).

The ordinance of baptism is a public symbol.¹⁰¹ When we are baptized, we are giving public witness that we believe in Christ and are committed to following him (Acts 10:47, 48).

We recognize a relationship between the baptism of the believer and the baptism of Jesus. Although the Scriptures teach that Jesus was without sin, he nevertheless submitted to the baptism administered by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:15).

We practice believer's baptism.

Those who profess faith in Christ and express commitment to follow him are eligible¹⁰² for baptism. The early Church made confession¹⁰³ and repentance prerequisites for baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:36). Since baptism properly comes after an expressed faith in Christ and conscious commitment to follow him, only believers are qualified candidates for baptism.

Because we believe that only willing response to God by the individual brings salvation, the Churches of God neither practices nor sees the necessity of infant baptism. We trust that those who have not yet reached the state of accountability are safe in the grace of God (2 Samuel 12:33; Matthew 18:10-14). Nonetheless, we believe that the child shares the benefits of Christian fellowship in the nurturing ministries of responsible parents and the Church. This responsibility is accepted and made meaningful in the service of Presentation of Children for the Lord's Blessing (Luke 18:15-17).

We believe the biblical form of baptism is by immersion.¹⁰⁴

The Bible says immersion was the form administered by John the Baptist and the apostles (Matthew 3:6, 16; Mark 1:5, 10; Acts 8:38, 39). Paul's explanation of the symbolism of baptism confirms that immersion is the form to be used (Romans 6:4). It has been our practice to administer baptism using the form as outlined in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

FEETWASHING

We believe in the ordinance of footwashing as a celebration of the incarnation.¹⁰⁵

We remember in this ordinance that Jesus Christ is the Word, which became flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). In describing what happened in the upper room, John affirmed the incarnation (John 13:3-4). We understand this ordinance to represent his giving up his heavenly glory to become a human being, and his willingness to take the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7-8).

There is an incarnational aspect of all believers as well. We believe that when a person is born again that he is filled with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:4).

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

As Christians, we are called to empty ourselves and be servants with our servant Lord. In this ordinance we commemorate the meaning of Christian life as a life of service. Jesus made this clear in the upper room when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:12-16).

Speaking to disciples anxious for position and power, who equated greatness with rank and authority, Jesus told them that he who would be the first must be the servant of all just as he came to serve and lay down his life for others (Mark 10:43-45).

Paul counseled the Church to keep perspective and follow Christ's example (Philippians 2:1-8). Whatever our position in society, washing one another's feet reminds Christians of their calling to serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ on equal footing with one another.

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

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet in the upper room, John declares this act to be an expression of the Master's love which even included Judas - the deceiver and betrayer (John 13:1).

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he gave them the new commandment to love one another just as he loved them by laying down his life for them, so that the world would know that they are his disciples (John 13:34-35). This Christ-like love for one another is essential to the life and witness of the Church.

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

The Christian life is a pilgrimage¹⁰⁶ (Hebrews 13:14). As we move toward the heavenly city,¹⁰⁷ we need each other and have the privilege and responsibility to serve one another (Galatians 6:2). We also need to allow others to bear our burdens. It is sometimes more difficult in the Church to allow ourselves to be ministered to than to minister.

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

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

The ordinance of footwashing is generally observed in conjunction¹⁰⁸ with the ordinance of the Lord's supper. It can help us come to the Lord's table properly prepared, in right relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ (Matthew 5:23-24). However, the ordinance of footwashing is effective whether or not in company with the Lord's supper. The celebration of the incarnation, the reminder that the Christian is called to be a servant, the need to express our Christian love and affection, and the opportunity to minister and be ministered to are all present whenever we observe this ordinance.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: COMMUNION

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

Jesus instituted the Lord's supper on the evening preceding the Crucifixion, during the Passover Feast (Luke 22:7-23). The Passover celebration commemorated the redemption of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:24-27). For the Christian, the Lord's supper commemorates the redemptive act of Christ in establishing the New Covenant. Jesus transformed the Passover meal into a memorial meal of himself for believers. Jesus is himself the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

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

The Lord's supper is recorded in three Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). These passages reveal that the broken bread represents the body of Christ given for us. The cup passed among the disciples symbolizes the blood Jesus shed for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 9:22). In receiving the bread and the cup, Christians remember that because Christ died they receive forgiveness for sin.

The Lord's supper is also an act of obedience and worship of Christ. The Apostle Paul recalled Jesus' words identifying the bread with his body and the cup with the new covenant made possible through his blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14, 15). Jesus commanded the eating and drinking of these elements in remembrance of his death (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

But participating in the Lord's supper is more than just an activity in which we remember Christ's sacrifice. Paul affirms that it not only bears witness but that it also points us to the future when Jesus will return (1 Corinthians 11:26). Therefore, it is also a foretaste¹⁰⁹ of the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

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

Christians believe that Christ will return for his followers, the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). In receiving the bread and the cup of the Lord's supper, the people of God testify that they eagerly await his coming and their ultimate redemption (Titus 2:13-14).

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

To participate in this ordinance one must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Anyone who confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord is eligible and invited to participate, regardless of church membership. Therefore, there are also no age requirements for participation. Participation by youth and children is left to the discretion of parents. And while participation is celebratory, the Lord's supper should always be observed with appropriate decorum¹¹⁰ (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The Bible clearly counsels that participation in the Lord's supper should come only after serious self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28). The concerns of self-examination include being truly committed to Jesus Christ, being conscious of what he did on the cross, and having a loving regard for his body, the Church (1 Corinthians. 11:17-32).

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

THE PRESENTATION OF CHILDREN FOR THE LORD'S BLESSING

We believe children are a gift of God.

The Bible clearly teaches that children are a gift of God and precious (Genesis 33:5; Psalm 127 and 128). God forms and gives special honor to every person (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5).

We believe we need to follow Jesus' example in ministering to children.

Jesus showed deep appreciation and concern for children (Matthew 19:13-15). So should the Church. In fact, Jesus set forth a child as a model for greatness in God's kingdom (Matthew 18:1-4) and warned against leading any child astray (Matthew 18:5, 6).

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

Children born to parents who are in the household of faith experience God's love through the care and loving concern of their Christian parents and the Church. It is appropriate that parents bring their children to the house of the Lord to be dedicated (1Samuel 1:27-28; Luke 2:22). This act of dedication recognizes their participation in the life of the family of God. In this service, children are set apart for the Lord. The congregation joins with the parents in pledging themselves to nurture those children in faith in Christ.

Child dedication as practiced in the Churches of God is not a sacrament nor is it a declaration of a child's faith. God's grace covers a person until such time as they are able to make a faith decision on their own (Matthew 18:10-14). That age will be different for each child. In the death of a person before that age, we believe that person goes to heaven. The same principle applies to the situation of the developmentally disabled person (Mark 9:36, 37).

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

The Old and New Testaments direct parents to raise their children with godly discipline and instruction (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Throughout the scriptures, God's people are urged to teach and nurture children by word and example (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:5-7). In presenting their child for the Lord's blessing, parents dedicate themselves as well as their child by publicly declaring a commitment to raise their child according to God's plan.

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

As children need warm relationships in their families, so they need warm relationships in the family of God. Such nurture is needed for both parents and children. This calls for a variety of educational opportunities and constant encouragement (Hebrews 10:25). Members of the congregation serve as models for parents and children, demonstrating what it means to be a Christian (John 13:34, 35; 1Thessalonians 5:11).

GLOBAL MISSION

We believe God is the author of mission.

Mission is about “being sent.” It is not something the Church initiates, but what God does by his Spirit in the world and through his people (Acts 1:4-8; 11:12-18). He is the God of mission who has always been at work revealing himself in the world (Romans 1:19; Acts 17:24-27).

From the calling of Abram and his descendants to be a blessing to the nations, God chooses people through whom he blesses others (Genesis 12:3b). All of Scripture declares God’s heart for the nations (Exodus 9:16; Isaiah 49:6; Malachi 1:11; Matthew 24:14; John 3:16-17; Romans 15:8-12).

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

Jesus commanded his followers to “...*make disciples of all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19). He further amplified that agenda by adding that the Spirit would empower them for a world-wide witness (Acts 1:8). The Church was birthed at Jerusalem (Acts 2) but soon spread to Judea (Acts 8:1; 9:31), Samaria (Acts 8:4-25) and the ends of the earth (Romans 1:5-8; 15:17-20). The Church is called to address these geographical and cultural challenges—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth—simultaneously, not sequentially.¹¹¹

God empowered the early disciples so that they could effectively serve as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection with a message that “...*repentance and forgiveness of sins...*” would be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-49). We are called to be “on mission” wherever we are as his representatives of the kingdom with a message of Good News (John 3:16). Jesus said his followers were to be the “*salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:13-16). We witness for Christ by our words and actions as evidence of the indwelling Christ living and working through us (Philippians 2:15).

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

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

We believe our ministries express the church’s participation in the mission of God.

God is concerned with every human need (Isaiah 58:5-7; Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 25:31-45; James 1:27; 2:14-17; I John 3:17-18). At the outset of his ministry, Jesus declared the extent of his concern (Luke 4:18-19).

God expands His mission through a variety of measures, such as proclamation of God's word (Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 11:19-24; 13); compassionate ministries (Acts 5:12-16; 9:32-43); gifts of leadership and service (Acts 6:1-7); obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26-39; 10:17-48; 16:6-10); prayer (Acts 1:12-14; 4:23-31; Colossians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2); sending and supporting of missionaries (Acts 13:1-4; 3 John 5-8); and planting new churches (Acts 14:21-23; 18:8-11).

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

From a human standpoint, local evangelism and global outreach are often motivated by a love for people who are not yet Christ's followers. To enter eternity without Christ is to miss heaven. But from a God-centered perspective, a higher motivation for missions is to see more glory given to God (Romans 15:8-9).

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

LAST THINGS

We believe there is a continuity¹¹² to history.

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

We believe Jesus will return.

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

We believe in the resurrection of the dead.

We believe that the bodies of those who have died believing in Jesus Christ as Savior will be resurrected and changed to glorified bodies like unto his. These new glorified bodies will then be reunited with their souls, already in the presence of the Lord, to spend eternity in the place he has prepared for them (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52; Revelation 20:4-7; John 14:1-6).

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

We believe in the judgment of God.

We believe those who have trusted in Jesus for salvation will stand before the judgment of Christ to give account for their works done for him (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is there they will receive crowns for lives pleasing to him (Hebrews 6:10). We believe the judgment of the believer's sin was taken by Christ on Calvary and has been forgiven and purged¹¹³ from the memory of God (Hebrews 10:17).

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

We believe in the ultimate glorification of all believers.

We believe that earthly, corruptible¹¹⁴ things cannot enter heaven (1 Corinthians 15:50). We believe we will, therefore, come to total sanctification, perfection and glorification when we enter his presence (1 John 3:2; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Romans 8:30).

We believe a unified theology regarding the sequence of last events is not essential to salvation.

We believe that individual understanding of how the events of last things will unfold has no impact upon the way to salvation or the work of Christ on the cross. We believe there are honest differing understandings regarding last things. We believe godly and learned scholars have arrived at differing and biblically supported understandings concerning the details of when and how last things will unfold. Accordingly, the Churches of God, General Conference has no established or universally accepted

dogma concerning the timetable, nature or sequence of these events. Individuals holding a wide spectrum of positions may be found within the Churches of God. All are expected to respect and show acceptance of others, whatever position they may hold. Further all are encouraged to prayerfully search the Scriptures and determine an individual position they can biblically defend. Individual differences regarding these matters should not be a catalyst for division in the body or a hindrance to the work of the Gospel.

APPENDIX A

Churches of God, General Conference Historic Statements of Faith 1844, 1926, & 1975

The Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) acknowledges the Bible as the “only and all sufficient rule of faith and practice” and affirms no creed as obligatory. However, from time to time the CGGC approved a statement of faith as a declaration of the “things believed among us.” These statements serve as a summary of the biblical doctrine commonly accepted within the fellowship. As such these expressions of faith have varied from statement to statement based on the needs and theological challenges at the time of writing. Nevertheless a comparison of these statements will show the core teachings of the CGGC have remained soundly biblical and consistent.

THE STATEMENT OF 1844

John Winebrenner’s Twenty-Seven Point Statement of Faith

John Winebrenner, *“History of the Churches of God,” All Religious Denominations* (Harrisburg: 1848), 170-180. First published in *An Original History of the Religious Denominations*, I. Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia, 1844). The multiple scripture references are not quoted below for the sake of brevity.

1. She [The Church of God] believes the Bible, or the canonical books of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, a revelation from God to man, and the only authoritative rule of faith and practice.
2. She believes in one Supreme God, consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that these three are co-equal and co-eternal.
3. She believes in the fall and depravity of man; that is to say, that man by nature is destitute of the favor and image of God.
4. She believes in the redemption of man through the atonement, or vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
5. She believes in the gift and office-work of the Holy Spirit; that is, in the enlightening, regenerating, and sanctifying influence and power of the Spirit.
6. She believes in the free, moral agency of man; that he has moral ability, because commanded, to repent and believe, in order to be saved; and that the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, has no foundation in the oracles of God.
7. She believes that man is justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, or by works of his own righteousness.
8. She believes in the necessity of regeneration or the new birth; or, in the change of man’s moral nature, after the image of God, by the influence and power of the word and spirit of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.
9. She believes in three positive ordinances of perpetual standing in the church, viz., *Baptism, Feet-washing, and the Lord’s Supper.*

10. She believes two things essential to the validity of baptism, viz., *faith* and *immersion*; that faith should always precede immersion; and that where either is wanting, there can be no scriptural baptism.
11. She believes that the ordinance of *feet-washing*, that is, the literal washing of the saint's feet, according to the words and example of Christ, is obligatory upon all Christians, and ought to be observed by all the churches of God.
12. She believes that the *Lord's Supper* should be often administered, and, to be consistent, to Christians only, in a sitting posture, and always in the evening.
13. She believes in the institution of the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath, as a day of rest and religious worship.
14. She believes that the reading and preaching of God's word, the singing of psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, and the offering up of prayers, are ordained of God, and ought to be regularly and devoutly observed by all the people and churches of God.
15. She believes in the propriety and utility of holding fast-days, experience meetings, anxious meetings, camp meetings, and other special meetings of united and protracted efforts for the edification of the church and the conversion of sinners.
16. She believes that the gospel ministry, Sabbath schools, education, the religious press, the Bible, missionary, temperance, and all other benevolent causes, ought to be heartily and liberally supported.
17. She believes that the church ought to relieve and take care of her own poor saints, superannuated ministers, widows and orphans.
18. She believes that the manufacture, traffic, and use of ardent spirits, as a beverage or common drink, is injurious and immoral, and ought to be abandoned.
19. She believes the system or institution of involuntary slavery to be impolitic or unchristian.
20. She believes that all civil wars are unholy and sinful, and in which the saints of the Most High ought never to participate.
21. She believes that civil governments are ordained of God for the general good; that Christians ought to be subject to the same in all things, except what is manifestly unscriptural; and that appeals to the law, out of the church, for justice, and the adjustments of civil rights, are not inconsistent with the principles and duties of the Christian religion.
22. She believes in the necessity of a virtuous and holy life, and that Christ will save those only who obey him.
23. She believes in the visibility, unity, sanctity, universality, and perpetuity of the church of God.
24. She believes in the personal coming reign of Jesus Christ.
25. She believes in the resurrection of the dead, "both of the just and the unjust;" that the resurrection of the just will precede the resurrection of the unjust; that the first will take place at the beginning, and the second at the end of the millennium.
26. She believes in the creation of new heavens and a new earth.
27. She believes in the immortality of the soul; in a universal and eternal judgment; and in future everlasting rewards and punishments.

THE STATEMENT OF 1925

The Centennial Statement based on Winebrenner's 27 Points (1844)

S. G. Yahn, History of the Churches of God (Harrisburg: 1926), 112-119. Scripture references are not quoted below for the sake of brevity.

We believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God;
that the inspiration of its writers enabled them to record truth without error;
and that it is our only and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice.

We believe in one supreme God
—the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—and that they are co-equal and co-eternal.

We believe in the miraculous conception,
the virgin birth,
the vicarious sacrifice,
the bodily resurrection,
the triumphant ascension
and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

We believe in his deity
—that he was, and is, God the Son as well as the Son of God.

We believe in the gift and work of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that God made man by an original specific act of creation.

We believe in the fall of man,
and that his only possible redemption is through the atonement of Christ.

We believe that man is justified by faith in Christ,
and not by works of the law, or by works of his own righteousness.

We believe in the free moral agency of man,
as opposed to his unconditional election or reprobation, i.e., that a man must
accept Jesus as his Savior, and of his own free will continue in the goodness of
God to be numbered with the elect.

We believe that only those who have been born again by the word and Spirit,
and who continue to manifest repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord
Jesus Christ, and to live virtuous and obedient lives will be saved.

We believe that sanctification of the *person* (personality)
is instantaneous and simultaneous with regeneration;
that the sanctification of the *nature*, is a gradual growth in grace and truth.

We believe in Baptism, Feet-washing and the Lord's Supper as church ordinances.

We believe in Christian unity,
in the Lord's Day as a time of rest and worship,
and that civil governments are ordained of God.

We believe in the immortality of the soul (that when a believer departs from the body he
is consciously at home with the Lord).

We believe in the resurrection of the dead,
in a judgment following the resurrection,
and in everlasting rewards and punishments.

Yahn's comment on the 1925 statement: *It will be noticed that the foregoing statements are substantially the same from a doctrinal viewpoint, thus showing that our people have held fast to the faith of the fathers without wavering. A few of the paragraphs in Winebrenner's statement—from 14 to 20 inclusive—pertain to church methods and public questions, and are not included in the statement of 1925, which is strictly doctrinal. On the other hand, the latter statement emphasizes the scriptural account of man's creation and the doctrines of Christ's miraculous conception, his virgin birth and his deity, because these were the doctrines against which modernism was making its special attack.*

THE STATEMENT OF 1975

The Sesquicentennial Statement based upon the 1925 Statement of Faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN APPENDIX B

ARC Allegheny Region Conference
CAE California Eldership
ERC Eastern Regional Conference
GRC Great Lakes Region Conference
MRC Mid-west Region Conference
MSR Mid-south Region
WRC Western Region Conference
WTS Winebrenner Theological Seminary

APPENDIX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The following list represents those who provided input into the writing and editing of the We Believe document at various symposiums and meetings across the Church from 2009 through 2013. Each one deserves special thanks for their perseverance in attempting to create a succinct yet thorough discussion of the beliefs commonly held in the Churches of God, General Conference. Please contact the General Conference offices in Findlay, Ohio to include in future editions any additional names accidentally omitted, or to make corrections.

Adams, Brad	GRC	Doyle, John	ARC
Adkins, Bob	ARC	Duffy, Judy	ARC
Akers, Woodson	ARC	Dukinor, D. L.	ARC
Allen, Shelby	ARC	Dukinor, Sharon	ARC
Allen, Walter	ARC	Dull, Ron	ERC
Arndt, Dennis	ARC	Draper, Andrew	MRC
Arndt, Julia	ARC	Draper, David	ERC, WTS
Asel, Bob	GRC	Draper, Linda	ERC
Aumsbaugh, Lee	MRC	Eatherton, Bob	MRC
Beerbower, David	MRC	Eding, Tim	GRC
Bender, Deb	ERC	Engelhardt, Don	ARC
Bistline, Randy	ERC	Everett, Joey	MSR
Bogges, Bob	ARC	Finley, Lance	GRC
Bons, Amanda	MRC	Follett, Ron	ARC
Bons, Scott	MRC	Foreman, Rachel	CGGC Staff
Boyer, Nancy	ERC	Fox, Danny	ARC
Brandt, Mary	ERC	Fox, Dave	ARC
Brickner, Micah	ERC	Frank, Chuck	ERC
Brougher, Shirley	ARC	Frederick, Dick	ERC
Brougher, Tom	ARC	Freeman, Jim	MRC
Brown, Milton	ERC	Ginter, Matt	GRC
Brunner, Denneta	MRC	Goodrick, Amanda	ARC
Brunner, Halen	MRC	Green, David	GRC
Buck, Nathan	GRC	Griffith, Andrew	ERC
Burns, John	CAE	Grubb, Arkie	MRC
Carney, Joe	GRC	Grubb, Don	MRC
Canterbury, Mark	ARC	Guirrier, Evenson	Haiti
Carlin, Floyd	ERC	Guy, Rob	ARC
Clemons, Darl	MRC	Guyler, Jack	ERC
Cocklin, Joel	ERC, WTS	Hamsher, Dennis	ERC
Cordell, Stan	ERC	Hanna, John	ARC
Craddock, Rheul	ARC	Hanna, Raemon	ARC
Cranmer, Joe	ARC	Harlan, Lloyd	MRC
Criminger, Fred	MRC	Halliday, Mark	ERC
Darraah, Stan	ERC	Hamlin, Julian	ARC
Davis, Albert	ARC	Harrison, Tina	ARC
Davis, Audrey	ARC	Harvey, Steve	MRC
DeBan, Sherry	ARC	Harvey, Rhonda	MRC
Dennison, Don	MRC	Hay, Dean	ARC
DeVincent, John	ARC	Horwedel, Dan	MRC
Dillewmeyer, Bob	ARC	Hosler, Mark	ERC
Dodds, John	GRC	Hostetter, Charlie	ERC
Donaldson, Bob	GRC	Hughes, Rick	MRC
Dorman, Cheryl	ERC	Inman, Kenny	MRC
Douglas, Doug	MRC	Jenkins, Gordon	MRC

Jenkins, Keith	MRC	Richardson, Kevin	ERC
Jenkins, Randy	ERC	Riley, Chuck	ERC
Jensen, George	ERC	Robinson, Dave	ERC
Johnson, Steve	MRC	Rockey, Jeff	MRC
Johnston, Mitch	ARC	Rosenberry, Edward	ERC
Kaufman, Arnie	GRC	Rosenberry, Linda	ERC
Keckler, Ben	MRC	Rosenberry, Trevor	ERC
Keckler, Jim	MRC	Rosser, Ken	GRC
Keefer, Brenda	ERC	Sabelhaus, Frank	MRC
Keefer, Shirley	ERC	Santmyer, Sandra	ARC
Keiser, Jim	GRC	Scheffer, Ron	ARC
Kelly, Brandon	GRC	Scheuing, Roger	ERC
Kidd, George	MRC	Scott, Holly	MRC
Kline, Lee	ARC	Scott, Phil	ERC
Klock, Jim	ERC	Scott, Ron	MRC
Knode, Gary	ERC	Shoemaker, Bill	GRC
Koontz, Denny	ERC	Shoup, Carol	ARC
Koontz, Jean	ERC	Show, Doug	ARC
Learn, David	ERC	Show, Vincent	ARC
Lehman, Mary	GRC	Showers, George	GRC
Leichliter, James	ARC	Skokut, Sam	ARC
Lucas, Thomas	ERC	Sloat, Bill	ERC
Martin, Jim	MRC	Smith, Bill	ARC
Meader, Ryan	MRC	Spangler, George	ERC
Meier, Justin	ERC	Spence, Jeff	MRC
Malick, Joan	ERC	Starkey, Eric	MRC
Malick, Bob	ERC	Staats, Gary	WTS
Maughan, Stan	ERC	Steinhauer, Terry	GRC
McClain, Mike	GRC	Stephenson, Bob	GRC
McGraw, Tom	ARC	Stillman, Steve	WRC
Metzler, Lawrence	ERC	Stoner, Frank	ARC
Mikkelsen, Ed	ARC	Sturr, Phil	ERC
Miller, Brian	MRC	Sullenberger, Sarah	ARC
Miller, Dick	ERC	Taylor, Eddie	ARC
Miller, Will	GRC	Templeton, Roger	ERC
Mills, Earl	ERC	Thomas, Fred	ERC
Mills, Kim	ERC	Tiffin, Todd	WRC
Monticue, Jim	ARC	Tobias, Ben	ARC
Moss, Jim Jr.	ERC	Tobias, Paul	ARC
Murdock, Stephanie	ARC	Toner, Marsha	MRC
Neely, Jon	ERC	Toner, Tom	MRC
Neely-Sleasman, Rachel	ERC	Tosten, Matt	MRC
Nelson, Bobbie	ARC	Walker, Michael	ERC
Nelson, Ray	ARC	Walters, P.D.	WRC
Nissley, John	WTS	Westerkamp, Laurel	MRC
Nolt, Doug	ARC	Whetstone, Steve	MRC
Osborn, Glenn	ERC	Weil, Tom	ERC
Owen, Stan	MRC	Wieland, Jack	MRC
Parthemore, Jeff	ERC	Welker, David	GRC
Pennington, Johnny	ARC	Wilder, Jim	GRC, WTS
Prichard, Darrell	GRC	Williams, David	ERC
Raderstorf, Keith	MRC	Wilson, Phil	WRC
Ream, Terry	GRC	Wingrove, Joe	ARC
Raudenbush, Walt	ERC	Yost, Dave	ERC
Reist, Bill	GRC	Zitch, Ken	ERC
Rempel, Larry	ARC	Zumbo, Anthony	ERC
Reser, George	MRC		

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY (ENDNOTES)

- ¹ **Eternal** – everlasting, continual; without beginning or end.
- ² **Spirit** – a supernatural being; not physical.
- ³ **Transcendent** – existing or living beyond what is material or known through the senses. A transcendent God exists beyond human life and experience.
- ⁴ **Judgments** – rulings; deciding what is right and wrong.
- ⁵ **Trinity** – the union of three divine persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) into one Godhead. This Godhead is a unity; it cannot be divided into three different “gods.”
- ⁶ **Indivisibly** – unable to be divided.
- ⁷ **Empowering** – giving power or ability to do something.
- ⁸ **Baptism** – immersion in water. See section on “Baptism” for a more detailed meaning of the biblical teaching and practice for Christians.
- ⁹ **Righteousness** – doing what is right or virtuous; fulfilling God’s moral law.
- ¹⁰ **Sustainer** – that which maintains, supports, and/or strengthens; that which continues the life of something.
- ¹¹ **Consecrate** – set apart as holy; devoting entirely to a specific purpose.
- ¹² **Glory** – God’s inexpressible beauty and majesty.
- ¹³ **Justice** – the practice of dealing fairly (impartially) and rightly with one another.
- ¹⁴ **Prophets** – persons called by God to speak in His name.
- ¹⁵ **Conscience** – moral awareness; a gift of God which serves as a guardian of morality in distinguishing right from wrong.
- ¹⁶ **Fellowship** – companionship; sharing a mutual experience.
- ¹⁷ **Church** – the body of Christ’s followers who have entered into a relationship with God through Jesus.
- ¹⁸ **Initiator** – one who is responsible for beginning something.

- ¹⁹ **Submission** – the act of surrendering to the will of another; a quality of obedience.
- ²⁰ **Merciful** – full of compassion; when kindness exceeds all expectations, especially if punishment is deserved.
- ²¹ **Kingdom** – the reign or rule of God who is active in history and human events. The kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven) was inaugurated by Jesus Christ and will be completed in the new heavens and new earth.
- ²² **Redemptive** – describing the process of recovering what was lost by making payment or sacrifice. We are “bought back” from the bondage of sin through the payment of Jesus’ death
- ²³ **High Priest** – a description of the person from the Old Testament Jewish Levitical system who offered sacrifices for the atonement of sin; fulfilled in Jesus. God appointed Him as the chief priest who would sacrifice himself so that others would receive the gift of eternal salvation
- ²⁴ **Covenant** – the act of God in freely establishing a mutually binding relationship with humankind.
- ²⁵ **Mediator** – a go-between; one who brings reconciliation between two parties.
- ²⁶ **Intercedes** – makes a request or pleads a case on behalf of another.
- ²⁷ **Reconciliation** – the act by which hostility is removed, and harmony is restored in relationship.
- ²⁸ **Demons** – spirit beings who, like Satan, have been in rebellion against God.
- ²⁹ **Pentecost** – the culmination of the Old Testament Feast of Weeks and the fiftieth day after Passover; it also corresponds to fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ and marks the beginning of the Church.
- ³⁰ **Sanctification** – the act of declaring and making holy; the act of purifying from sin. In the Christian’s life, sanctification can be described as being both instantaneous and gradual (an event and a process).
- ³¹ **Regeneration** – a spiritual rebirth; the act of being made new and completely transformed. See section on “Regeneration.”
- ³² **Baptism of the Spirit** – the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life.
- ³³ **Endows** – provides a quality gift.
- ³⁴ **Communion** – an intimate relationship with deep understanding.

- ³⁵ **Spiritual gifts** – special abilities or qualities given by the Holy Spirit to each member of the body of Christ, according to God’s grace and will, for the sake of ministry to others.
- ³⁶ **Inspired** – literally “God-breathed;” communicated by divine influence.
- ³⁷ **Infallible** – completely dependable, incapable of error or mistake.
- ³⁸ **Authority** – the power or right to command and expect obedience.
- ³⁹ **Fallible** – capable of error; liable to be mistaken or inaccurate.
- ⁴⁰ **Salvation** – God’s deliverance from the power and effects of sin through the work of Jesus Christ so that humans can enjoy the fullness of life which He intended.
- ⁴¹ **Creed** – a summary statement of Christian belief.
- ⁴² **Culture** – the ideas and values which shape the behavior of a specific group of people.
- ⁴³ **Canon** – the collection of books that the Church recognized as the written Word of God and thus authoritative for faith and practice in the Church.
- ⁴⁴ **Apostolic** – derived from the direct revelation of God through the original twelve disciples (minus Judas Iscariot) and Paul.
- ⁴⁵ **Fallen state** – the spiritual, physical, and social consequences imposed upon the entire human race as a result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience.
- ⁴⁶ **Only begotten** – unique; one of a kind.
- ⁴⁷ **Exemplify** – to show by example.
- ⁴⁸ **Atoning** – satisfying for wrongdoing; reconciling.
- ⁴⁹ **Abolish** – to bring to an end.
- ⁵⁰ **Interpretation** – an explanation of what is not immediately plain in the Bible.
- ⁵¹ **Theology** – the study of the nature of God and Christian faith based on divine self-revelation.
- ⁵² **Transform** – to radically change.
- ⁵³ **Precepts** – commandments meant as rules of conduct.
- ⁵⁴ **Exhortations** – strong encouragements; earnest urgings.

- ⁵⁵ **Imperceptible** – incapable of being understood or discerned by the senses or intellect.
- ⁵⁶ **Archeological** – pertaining to the scientific study of the life and culture of civilizations by excavating ancient cities, relics, or artifacts.
- ⁵⁷ **Theoretical** – limited to speculation; hypothetical (not based on proven fact).
- ⁵⁸ **Dogmatically** – stated opinion in a dictatorial or arrogant manner.
- ⁵⁹ **Animated** – given life; put into motion.
- ⁶⁰ **Soul** – the spiritual nature (essence) of individual human life created by God.
- ⁶¹ **DNA** – basic material in human beings which contains the genetic code and transmits hereditary patterns.
- ⁶² **Procreation** – the production of offspring.
- ⁶³ **Stewards** – persons entrusted with managing resources for which they are accountable to God
- ⁶⁴ **Sin** – the universal state of alienation from God which results in disobedience and wrongdoing.
- ⁶⁵ **Serpent** – another term for Satan who appears in the Garden of Eden as a snake-like creature.
- ⁶⁶ **Nullify** – to void or cancel out.
- ⁶⁷ **Grace** – the undeserved and free favor of God toward humanity.
- ⁶⁸ **Free moral agent** – a person able to think and act according to one's own will and free to choose between good and evil in relationship to God and others.
- ⁶⁹ **Supernatural** – that which is outside the normal human experience; not explainable by human science.
- ⁷⁰ **Sins of omission** – failure to do what is right due to ignorance or negligence.
- ⁷¹ **Perceptiveness** – ability to comprehend.
- ⁷² **Justification** – the act of being made acceptable; being freed from blame and guilt.
- ⁷³ **Guilty** – deserving blame and punishment.
- ⁷⁴ **Simultaneously** – happening or existing at the same time.

- ⁷⁵ **Pardon** – to cancel punishment; forgiveness.
- ⁷⁶ **Culminating** – resulting; reaching the highest point.
- ⁷⁷ **Appropriated** – taken for one’s own.
- ⁷⁸ **Glorification** – the final stage in salvation when believers attain complete conformity to the image and likeness of the glorified Christ and are freed from both physical and spiritual defect.
- ⁷⁹ **Instantaneously** – happening all at once, in a single moment.
- ⁸⁰ **Progressive** – moving forward, ongoing.
- ⁸¹ **Imputed** – credited or assigned a quality to someone; a change in status before God because of what He has done for us.
- ⁸² **Imparted** – given a share or portion of; an internal change in being which comes through receiving a portion of God’s righteousness.
- ⁸³ **Eradicated** – uprooted, wiped out, or destroyed.
- ⁸⁴ **Indispensable** – essential; absolutely necessary.
- ⁸⁵ **Prerequisites** – something required beforehand as a necessary condition for what follows.
- ⁸⁶ **Apostles’ teaching** – see “Apostolic” in glossary (No. 44).
- ⁸⁷ **Breaking of bread** – could simply imply “eating together,” but commonly understood to mean sharing together in the Lord’s supper as a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- ⁸⁸ **Mission** – God’s redemptive and historical initiative on behalf of His creation.
- ⁸⁹ **Wholeness** – spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical well-being.
- ⁹⁰ **Ordinances** – acts authorized, practiced, and endorsed by Christ; religious rites in the Church. See section on “The Ordinances.”
- ⁹¹ **Church discipline** – the process of accountability in the Church whereby members receive spiritual nurture and correction (when belief and/or practice are contrary to Scripture).
- ⁹² **Presbyterial** – relating to a system of church government and organization in which authority is delegated to the elders (or Presbyters).

⁹³ **Elders** – persons holding positions of greatest responsibility and authority in local Church leadership. Pastors are considered “teaching elders” in the Church.

⁹⁴ **Deacons** – literally “servant;” persons primarily responsible to serve practical needs in the Church.

⁹⁵ **Festivals** – days of celebration.

⁹⁶ **Perpetual** – ongoing, continuing indefinitely without interruption.

⁹⁷ **Commemorate** – to keep alive the memory of something, especially by ceremony or rite.

⁹⁸ **Incumbent** – necessary for or resting on (someone) as a duty or obligation.

⁹⁹ **Passion** – referring to Christ’s suffering and death on the cross.

¹⁰⁰ **Fundamental** – essential; radical.

¹⁰¹ **Symbol** – something that represents another thing, an object used to represent something abstract.

¹⁰² **Eligible** – qualified, suitable.

¹⁰³ **Confession** – the act of verbalizing commitment to Christ and His teachings; the act of acknowledging sin.

¹⁰⁴ **Immersion** – the act of plunging completely under the water.

¹⁰⁵ **Incarnation** – the event of God taking on flesh (human form and nature).

¹⁰⁶ **Pilgrimage** – a long journey; a way of living in which everything is evaluated by reaching the goal.

¹⁰⁷ **Heavenly city** – the destination of every follower of Christ; heaven.

¹⁰⁸ **Conjunction** – when two or more events or things occur together.

¹⁰⁹ **Foretaste** – a preliminary glimpse of that which will be fully experienced later.

¹¹⁰ **Decorum** – dignity; governed by acceptable standards of behavior.

¹¹¹ **Sequentially** – consecutively; one after another.

¹¹² **Continuity** –connectedness.

¹¹³ **Purged** – eliminated; removed.

¹¹⁴ **Corruptible** – that which has been contaminated by sin; morally evil.

APPENDIX D: KEY THEOLOGICAL TERMS

Atoning, atonement – p. 1, 4, 16, 17, 24, 28, 31, 36, 43

Baptism – p. 4, 6, 7, 12, 28, 31, 33

Baptism of the Spirit – p. 12, 14

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Deacons – p. 30

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