

# **Frequently Asked Questions**

## **What is the future of the Church of God reformation movement?**

We believe that the Church of God will have an increased and significant ministry in the twenty-first century. Consultations and conferences are taking place on national, international, local, and district levels, challenging Christians to consider the current and future nature of our world, and how best to share the gospel and call persons to discipleship. We are aware that the coming decades will be a time of crisis for the earth and its people. We are giving attention to a range of needs and issues that include the environment, peace and reconciliation, poverty and hunger, population trends, evangelism and church growth needs, and unity and interdependence in a society and world marked by cultural diversity. We feel God has called us to be involved in ministering to the needs of people everywhere and to live responsibly in the whole universe. We seek to be a redemptive, reconciling force for peace in the years to come.

## **How big is the Church of God?**

In the United States and Canada, we have about 2,300 congregations and more than 250,000 persons who attend the worship services of those local churches on a typical Sunday. Though many congregations do retain a list of Christians who are a part of their fellowship, you will remember that we do not keep formal membership lists, and so precise figures are more difficult to determine than in many groups. An interesting fact: The number of persons who are associated with the Church of God in other countries surpassed the number of those in the United States and Canada in 1983. The church is growing at a vigorous pace in the southern Africa and Asia/Pacific regions and in Latin America. In addition, strong evangelistic programs are resulting in new congregations being planted in strategic locations throughout North America and in a variety of international locations. By the year 2025, the Church of God plans to more than double the number of its congregations and constituents within the United States, Canada, and around the world.

## **What restrictions do you place on your members in the Church of God?**

Diversity, within the scope of the teachings of Jesus Christ, is expected. Conformity in all matters of doctrine and practice is not the goal of the Church of God for its people. We are mutually committed to God in Christ, to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and to local, national, and international fellowship with Christians. Some congregations and some individual Christians may tend toward a major involvement with social causes as an expression of their personal faith. Others may concern themselves principally with an individual expression of piety and often focus on personal religious lifestyles. There is room for both types of witness and concern.

Our relatedness to each other in the church does not depend on a strict and uniform doctrinal stance but on our commitment to Jesus Christ, bringing his spirit to bear on our personal lives and society. We see our bodies as "temples of the Holy Spirit" and therefore urge abstinence from some specific behaviors such as sexual immorality and the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and drugs for pleasure or psychological escape (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19–20).

## **Theologically, how do you stand in relationship to other church groups?**

Without getting involved in detailed definitions, we like to think of ourselves as conservative, rooted in Wesleyan-Arminian theological heritage, a part of the Anabaptist free-church tradition, a part of the Holiness Movement that came to mid-America in the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries, and a participant in the Protestant tradition. We value the insights of those who espouse fundamentalist, liberal, neoorthodox, liberation, and process theologies, but we have some serious questions about some of the methods and conclusions of these schools of thought.

## **Are you charismatic? Are you Pentecostal?**

Yes! and No! We are charismatic if by that you mean that persons and churches are empowered by the Spirit for the edification of the church on mission in the world. Yes, we are Pentecostal if by the term you mean that the Holy Spirit was given to the early church and continues to come, empower, and call the church to servant ministries. No, if you mean by charismatic or Pentecostal an emphasis on speaking in tongues as the sign of a spirit-filled life or the freedom for persons to speak in tongues at their own discretion in public worship.

## **Are you a member of the National Council or World Council of Churches?**

No. We are ecumenical in spirit and in practice but have not felt participation in either of these organizations is the best way to give witness to the unity of Christians or the most effective way to expand

our world ministries. We cannot honor some actions and programs of these organizations. On the other hand, some programs, literature, and opportunities for service initiated by them are obviously Spirit-inspired. We have occasionally taken the opportunity to cooperate with our Christian brothers and sisters in these organizations as the most effective way of doing some tasks and as an expression of Christian unity. A few congregations participate in the activities of the National Association of Evangelicals and the Christian Holiness Association. Most pastors actively participate in community ministerial and church organizations.

### **Do you believe persons have to be baptized in the Church of God in order to go to heaven?**

No. Baptism is a first step in the life of the Christian convert. When a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, it is expected that the person will take the first step of following Jesus Christ in baptism (Mark 1); however, believers who have been baptized in other church groups will find their baptisms honored. Persons who have been baptized as infants are encouraged to appreciate the act of faith on the part of their parents and to witness to their own decision for Christ through believer's baptism. We rejoice in the provision of God for the salvation and eternal life of persons whom we shall never know, persons who are active in hundreds of other Christian groups. It will be a joy to get acquainted with all those persons in heaven!

### **What do you mean by stewardship?**

Stewardship is the responsible use of all of our resources, recognizing that all good gifts come from God. It has implications for the use of our abilities, the use of time, and the way we earn and spend our money. Christian stewardship includes the practice of giving the first 10 percent of one's income directly to the church for missions and ministries—the tithe. We believe tithing is taught in the Old Testament (Malachi 3:8–10) and the principle and practice is sustained in New Testament teachings (Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and 2 Corinthians 8:1–5). It is the foundation for a more complete financial stewardship. While many persons of the Church of God are tithers, tithing itself is not looked upon as a means by which one manipulates God in order to obtain material success. It is a spiritual discipline which is a reward in itself. Many Christians not only give the first 10 percent of their income (tithe) to the church but also give additional offerings to help build church facilities and make faith promise commitments to missions causes.

### **Do you believe in divine healing?**

Yes. We believe that, in a broader sense, all healing is divine. Thus we encourage consultation with medical professionals in matters of physical health and with other professionals in matters of emotional and relational problems. We believe these professionals can be used by God to bring health to ill and injured persons.

In addition to the healing that comes through natural processes and the informed use of medication and surgery, we believe that at times God directly intervenes in the life of individuals to initiate and complete healing. We put into practice James' instructions to the young church: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14, niv).

In many congregations, persons come forward following the sermon and request that the pastor anoint and pray for them. In some congregations, people are given an opportunity to come forward before the pastoral prayer, to inform the pastor of an individual need (whether it be for physical, emotional, or relational healing), and to be anointed for prayer.

We do not demand of God or arrogantly instruct him about the way healing should take place. We submit our petition and await his gracious action in our lives and in the lives of those whom we love. We do not believe that everyone is healed in the way that we would expect and hope, or even that it is best for everyone to be healed. In praying for healing, we enter into a trust relationship with God; we trust that he will do the best thing for his kingdom and our lives. We believe he knows what is best, even though, for the moment, we may not be able to comprehend it (Job 9:10; Psalm 145:3).

### **What do you teach about Jesus' second coming?**

We believe that Jesus will come again, but we have no idea about the date and time (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32–37). Our eschatology (knowledge or study of last things) emphasizes that when Jesus comes to receive his bride, the church, all things of this world will end, and those who have believed on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will go with him to live eternally. Our view of the kingdom of God is that it is a

present reality. We believe that when Jesus came to earth, he launched his kingdom (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 17:20–26), and his kingdom is in the hearts of men and women who give him their allegiance. We are aware of the diligent study by many premillennial scholars and the optimism of postmillennial Christians; however, we are amillennial. In our study of the Bible, we do not discover any teaching about an earthly reign of Christ in a governmental or military sense. Scriptures speak of last things in figurative language (Revelation 20), and we believe they often refer to spiritual rather than temporal realities. We, for the most part, find little doctrinal compatibility with groups who see the establishment and success of the nation of Israel as essential to God's plan (Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 3:26–28). Teachings which give attention to repeatedly setting dates for the expected return of Christ, to observing natural and other phenomena as indications of the imminent appearance of Christ, and to identifying contemporary historical personages as embodiments of the anti-Christ are likewise foreign to our understanding of Scripture. With persons who feel strongly about these points of view, we agree to disagree and explore other ways of experiencing and expressing our oneness in Christ. We work and pray for Christ's coming (Revelation 22:20–21). The principal task of Christians, we feel, is to be involved in God's redemptive plan—sharing the gospel rather than speculating about the nature and timing of last things. Most Church of God congregations accept a range of opinions and beliefs on last things.

### **What is the nature of your worship services?**

Our congregations rather closely follow the biblical injunction to do all things in "a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40, niv). Scripture is read with a sense of profound respect. The gospel message is preached with enthusiasm, usually as an exposition of a scriptural passage, relating it to the contemporary situation of the worshipers. Spontaneity marks many of our services. In some congregations, persons will affirm the message of the pastor or a song with an "Amen!" Occasionally, persons may respond to a well-sung song, greet special guests, or receive an important announcement with applause. Laypersons are often enlisted for leadership in services.

Church of God worship services are characterized by good singing. We sing hymns, gospel songs, choruses, and spirituals. Many excellent volunteer choirs sing a wide range of music, from simple gospel songs to the most challenging anthems. A time to greet each other and get acquainted is often included during or immediately following the worship experience.

### **Who speaks for the Church of God on social issues?**

The General Assembly in its annual June session often considers and sometimes adopts resolutions that speak to social issues such as alcoholism, abortion, war and peace, divorce, and sexual relationships. Sometimes these resolutions are presented by interest or geographical groups represented in the Assembly. These resolutions usually express the attitude of many within the Church of God but are not necessarily binding on congregations or individual Christians within the body. The resolutions often are worded so as to provoke thoughtful discussion and local initiatives.

### **Are you a missions-minded church?**

Definitely! The Church of God emphatically asserts that all Christians are called to world and local missions and that some individuals are particularly gifted for special assignments in the missions tasks. North American and international missions efforts are facilitated and resourced as a result of the partnership between local congregations and Church of God Ministries, the organization entrusted with coordination of the united ministry and outreach efforts of the movement. Though the focus of missions is often on those who are called and sent, we believe that the total church is responsible for taking Christ to men, women, and children everywhere. Our churches voluntarily pool their prayers and financial support to accomplish together what none could do alone.

*\* Information on this page is excerpted from Oral and Laura Withrow, **Meet Us at the Cross** (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1999), 25–31*