

The Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP) Committee Report

To the 102nd International Assembly Church of God of Prophecy

PREAMBLE

1 We greet the delegates and friends to the 102nd International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy. We have assembled from across the globe, from urban areas and metropolises, to villages, hamlets, rural farmlands, and tribal lands. We assemble as one in Christ, brothers and sisters, equals as members of this great Church.¹ Our goal is to embody the Apostle Paul's salvific statement, "In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28 NCV).

2 We have gathered in Orlando to worship our Savior, fellowship with the saints, be challenged by the casting of vision, learn together, and to engage in the noble task of adjudicating business for this community of faith as the International Assembly (IA) in session. Rising to this task, we have outlined the following to be our guide for proper business procedure and protocol providing clarity for all in order to achieve the goal of Acts 15, that every decision we make will seem good to the Holy Spirit and to us (Acts 15:28). Accordingly, we offer the following guidelines for business proceedings in this Assembly:

1. Once the Moderator has acknowledged the respective Chairman and members of the Assembly Committees, providing them permission to present their reports, they will do so in due course.
2. Committee members will present sections to the IA for its consideration.
3. Once the section and recommendations have been clearly placed before the IA, the Moderator will call for a motion and a second for discussion/questions of said section/recommendations.
4. Any member in good standing (faithful to the local church and faithful in tithing) may request to speak from the Assembly floor at a designated microphone. He/she will provide to the clerk stationed at the microphone his/her name.
5. The Moderator will recognize a constituent at the microphone.
6. Prior to making a comment or posing a question, the member at the microphone is to provide the following information:

¹ Where the word church represents the longer title, Church of God of Prophecy, it is capitalized in this document.

- a. Name
 - b. Location of church membership
 - c. Acknowledge that he/she has read the report in its entirety in order to be granted permission to speak by the Moderator
7. Unless the speaker is raising a point of order, the question/comment is to be directed to the committee. Points of order are directed to the Moderator. The Chairman, the presenter of the section, or any of the members of the committee may engage in the discussion. All questions/comments related to the report are to be directed to and responded to by the committee.
 8. At any point, the Moderator may interject, ask a question, and/or request further clarification from either the speaker from the floor or the committee.
 9. The Moderator, in due course, will call for an Assembly response. Matters of business require overwhelming consensus. Spiritual matters require one-accord.

Decision-Making Processes

3 In the BDP report, the following sections are business matters and require overwhelming consensus, which will be considered achieved at seventy-five percent (75%) of expressions cast.

- a. Temporary Suspension of Evaluation Process for Pastors and National/Regional/State Bishops
- b. Leadership Succession

4 In the BDP report, the following sections are spiritual matters in nature and require one accord, which will be considered achieved at ninety percent (90%) of expressions cast.

- a. The Lord's Supper
- b. Race Relations and Reconciliation

5 All other Assembly standing committees—the Finance and Stewardship (F&S) and the Corporate Board of Directors (CBD), formerly the Administrative Committee (AC)—follow overwhelming consensus for decision making per the *Ministry Policy Manual*.

The F&S Committee is to focus on practical matters, including promotional and fund-raising projects. Thus, when determining the Assembly's expression, the one-accord principle will be used for the BDP on doctrinal matters while the overwhelming consensus will determine all other matters and those presented by the F&S and the AC.²

² *Ministry Policy Manual* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2018), 14.

Section One
Temporary Suspension of Evaluation Process of
Pastors and National/Regional/State Bishops for Study Purposes

6 The goal of the evaluation process for Presiding Bishop (PB), General Presbyters (GPs), National/Regional/State (N/R/S) Bishops, and local Pastors³ was to assist in the maturation of leaders for each to fulfill his/her maximum potential. The goal is noble. However, as with most processes, the implementation and ongoing management of procedures, methods, statistical data, assessment instruments, and the coalescing of findings and reports can become laborious, time-consuming, and bureaucratic in nature. The BDP recognizes that the evaluation process has become more burdensome in some areas than helpful and informative, tending to administrative minutiae rather than apostolic ministry.

7 Additionally, we note that in the International Presbytery, procedures and methods have been modified, with the addition of an International Presbytery Review Board elected to oversee the process which has created a helpful approach to evaluation. However, we also acknowledge that even with these improvements, there have been instances of uncertainty and confusion. Yet, since the Presiding Bishop and General Presbyters are selected and not appointed, we do not feel that a suspension in the evaluation process is warranted. We do recommend that the International Presbytery (IP) be given the latitude to govern and implement evaluation improvements and procedures for the PB and GPs as properly decided upon by an overwhelming consensus of the members of the IP in an IP business session.

8 The evaluation of appointed leaders, N/R/S Bishops, and local Pastors has not progressed as well as the evaluation processes of the PB and GPs. Some areas report extremely low percentages of participation by Pastors in the evaluation of the N/R/S Bishops. Additionally, many of the N/R/S Bishops do not engage in evaluation by local boards and/or members of the local church of their Pastor. Rather than have policy in place that is not being followed, or that is so bureaucratic that it requires the expenditure of valuable time and financial resources, we feel that it would be wise to temporarily suspend the evaluation process of N/R/S Bishops and local Pastors until the BDP can engage in a study and recommendation concerning evaluations at these two levels. Given our present docket of studies, we recommend a suspension for six years, while we study this topic. The Committee⁴ could then bring a further recommendation regarding evaluations for N/R/S Bishops and local Pastors to the International Assembly in 2030. In the interim of the suspension, a GP in consultation with his plurality team, could engage an evaluation of an N/R/S Bishop, if in the opinion of the GP and his

³ The BDP wishes to show the Committee's utmost respect to the honorable leaders of this movement throughout the world. For that purpose, ministerial and administrative titles will be capitalized in this document except where they are not capitalized in citations from other sources.

⁴ Where the word committee represents the longer title, Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, it is capitalized in this document.

plurality team, it is warranted. Accordingly, an N/R/S Bishop in consultation with his plurality team, could engage an evaluation of a local Pastor if, in the opinion of the N/R/S Bishop and his plurality team, it is warranted.

9 To continue with a broken and defective evaluation process that does not garner significant participation for N/R/S Bishops and local Pastors seems ill advised. While we do not seek to spiritualize this recommendation, we do note that the Sabbath principle reminds us that when systems become overly cumbersome, they cease to provide their original intended purpose. Jesus stated, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NIV). The Committee does not utilize this passage as a proof text, rather we reference the principle contained within our Lord’s directive.

Section Two Leadership Succession

10 The BDP Committee received a request from the General Overseer, Bishop Sam Clements, now emeritus Presiding Bishop, and the General Presbyters in 2018 to engage in a study of term limits for all positional leadership⁵ in the Church of God of Prophecy. The Committee communicated in our “Notice of Study” statement released to the constituency of this Church in 2020 that we were engaged in research and invited correspondence from members and leaders in the Church. As of December 31, 2022, the BDP is not in receipt of any formal written correspondence directed to the Committee from either constituents or leaders relating to this topic. However, both constituents and leaders of the Church of God of Prophecy have engaged Committee members in conversations in support of this study and the principle of term limits. Additionally, the BDP Committee introduced the subject of term limits to the 101st International Assembly (2022) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Committee heard from a plethora of constituents, both during the IA and afterwards, who were confused as to the process and unclear as to the ultimate decision.⁶ Consequently, the BDP Committee is submitting the following revised report, titled “Leadership Succession”⁷ with our

⁵ Please note: The BDP is not recommending term limits for all positional leaders in the Church of God of Prophecy. The BDP emphatically contends that term limits do not apply to local Pastors or appointed positions within a local church context.

⁶ As a historical point of reference, the document titled “Term Limits” presented to the 101st International Assembly was seventeen (17) pages in single-space type. According to the *Full Transcript of the Assembly Business, Church of God of Prophecy, 101st International Assembly* (July 20, 2022), the first “time-stamped” entry regarding term limits was 5:18 p.m. (see page 33). The last “time-stamped” entry was 5:36 p.m., stating, “The session was dismissed” (see page 34). Approximately twenty minutes, or less, was given to the seventeen-page document. The document was provided to the BDP Committee by the Office of the Presiding Bishop via email dated September 28, 2023.

⁷ The title of the report to the 101st Assembly was “Term Limits.” The Committee has renamed the report to the 102nd Assembly: “Leadership Succession.” The terms “leadership succession” and “tenure” will be utilized synonymously throughout this document.

recommendations for the prayerful consideration by the delegates to the 102nd International Assembly.

11 The research by the Committee has included both leadership literature as well as interviews with denominational leaders not affiliated with the Church of God of Prophecy whose polity includes term limits, the principle of leadership succession. The culmination of our study and recommendations are included in this report.⁸

The document includes the following:

1. A Theology of Leadership
2. A Biblical Rationale of Leadership
3. Leadership in the Ecclesia
4. Leadership Pipeline
5. Leadership Vacuum
6. Incremental and Specific Implementation
7. Exit Strategy
8. Recommendations for Leadership Succession: Phase One
9. Assessment Recommendation in Preparation for Phase Two.

A Theology of Leadership

12 Leadership theory espouses the maxim that everything rises and falls on leadership. This truth is apparent in a myriad of group dynamics, inclusive but not limited to the family unit, governments, corporations, educational entities, and ultimately in the church. Leadership does indeed matter. Theologically, the need for anointed and gifted leaders is fundamental to the healthy operations of the ecclesia.

13 Two components of ecclesial leadership are noteworthy. One is calling. The second is confirmation. Calling is personal. The Triune God calls individuals into service, into ministry.⁹ The dynamic of calling is witnessed repeatedly throughout both the Old and New Testaments. God called Moses (Exodus 3:1–22), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1–21), Gideon (Judges 6:11–24), David (1 Samuel 16:1–13), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–8). Jesus called the disciples, the twelve apostles, who accompanied him in his ministry (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). Calling is personal. It is the individual’s responsibility to answer the call of God upon his or her life (2 Timothy

⁸ Readers should be aware that each of these sections could be expanded; however, that would necessitate the report being a lengthier document. The goal has been to identify and succinctly address each of the rubrics, which comprise the study, rather than provide an exhaustive report.

⁹ The BDP recognizes that God calls all believers. Believers are called to be saints, to holiness: “To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2 CSB). Additionally, all believers are called to service. Believers are empowered with grace giftings by the Holy Spirit to offer in service: “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10 CSB). We also embrace that the Triune God does call some individuals to specific ministry assignments. Consequently, in the body of this report we utilize the term “calling” to specify individuals called to ministry giftings as stipulated by the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 4:11–13; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9).

4:5). Theologian H. Richard Niebuhr identifies this as the “secret call . . . that inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself [or herself] directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of the ministry.”¹⁰

14 Confirmation of the call is public and occurs within the dynamic of the ecclesia (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Consequently, it is the church’s obligation to discern if indeed the call of God is upon an individual (Acts 13:1–3). Once the call of God upon an individual is discerned, the church then has the responsibility of equipping the called for acts of service and ministry within the body of Christ and to the world at large (Ephesians 4:12). For instance, the newly converted Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, was embraced by Barnabas. He escorted Saul to the apostles for their endorsement. “But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus” (Acts 9:27 NASB20). Saul remained with the apostles and demonstrated his genuine call and commitment to the gospel (Acts 9:28). This model illustrates that when an individual has proven himself or herself (1 Timothy 4:15), it is the church who publicly confirms the called and provides an opportunity for servant leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

15 As people who fully embrace the leading of the Spirit, some may be tempted to simply accept a public confession of calling by an individual. However, the ecclesia is tasked with discerning the call. Discernment is one of the *charismata* gifted to the church by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1–11). Yet, discernment is not only supernatural. There are measures of discernment. “Unless there are external standards by which a calling is tested and confirmed, we lack the means to discern whether a person is truly called by God through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

16 Theologian Gregg R. Allison, in his book on ecclesiology, addresses the theology of leadership in the church. Specifically, Allison contends:

17 Leadership capacities energized by the Spirit are activities and ministries oriented toward covenant keeping and community formation and development: discerning God’s will for the church and effectively communicating this vision to its members; conceptualizing, designing, developing, and executing ministries; motivating and equipping church members for ministries; managing people and their activities; achieving substantial consensus; anticipating and resolving problems and conflicts; and other similar administrative elements.¹²

18 Admittedly, hundreds of definitions from various vantage points and orientations are proffered in leadership theory to articulate what constitutes a leader and effective

¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper, 1956), 64.

¹¹ L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 83.

¹² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 417.

leadership. Effective leading is much more than wearing a title, occupying an office, or securing a position. Leadership, simply stated, is influence. Yet, within a leadership construct, identifiable positional leadership is warranted.

A Biblical Rationale of Leadership

19 Leadership is an unmistakably biblical premise. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul identifies “ministerial gifts” deposited within the church. Specifically, the gifts mentioned by Paul are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:11–15).¹³ Additionally, the Pastoral Epistles indicate ministerial roles of elders, specifically, bishops (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:8–13). Accordingly, Titus is instructed by Paul to appoint elders in every city of Crete (Titus 1:5). The ordination/appointment of elders/leaders appears to be the practice of a systematization of leadership in the first century, apostolic church. “When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23 CSB). Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, addresses the saints/believers of the church, and their leaders, the bishops and deacons (Philippians 1:1).

20 The focus of this biblical rationale is on the positional and service role of bishops, in particular. Consequently, Paul proffers the prerequisites for bishops who lead the church in various manifestations of hierarchical positions. J. Oswald Sanders, in his book titled, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, provides a helpful categorization of the biblical prerequisites. They are (1) social qualifications, (2) moral qualifications, (3) mental qualifications, (4) personality qualifications, (5) domestic qualifications, and (6) maturity.¹⁴

Leadership in the Ecclesia

21 As acknowledged in the section titled “A Theology of Leadership,” it is the Triune God who calls individuals into service. This call of God to ministry in general, and a specific assignment in particular, has historically been viewed by the Church of God of Prophecy as theocracy. Simply stated, theocracy is the rule of God. While the principles of theocracy are biblical, the application of theocracy can become skewed given human/sinful nature. That is, not all actions labeled theocratic are indeed the will of God. With this admission comes the challenge to seek the will of God with an open heart, discerning his leading, informed by the principle of informed discernment within the multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 20:18).

¹³ The Church of God of Prophecy understands apostles and prophets to be foundational positions of leadership in the construction of the church. While we do not recognize apostles and prophets, we do concede that individuals do, at times, function in an apostolic and/or prophetic manner.

¹⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 44–52. Rather than add to the length of this document, readers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these qualifications as outlined by Sanders.

22 In the Church of God of Prophecy, two types of positional leadership processes are identified: (1) Selected Leaders and (2) Appointed Leaders. The two terms are integral to the research, discussion, and recommendations in this report. Consequently, the focus of this section is on bishops who fulfill a positional role either as a selected leader or an appointed leader.

Selected Leaders

23 Selected leaders are individuals who are chosen to occupy a particular positional office by a constituent group within the Church of God of Prophecy. These leaders are not appointed to their positional role by a supervising hierarchical leader. Selected leaders include: (1) Presiding Bishop and (2) General Presbyter.

- 24
1. The Presiding Bishop. The Presiding Bishop is selected according to the process outlined by the International Assembly. Details of this process are enumerated in the *Governance Manual of the International Presbytery*. Succinctly stated, the Presiding Bishop goes through a selection process within the governance of the International Presbytery. Once a final candidate has been selected, he is presented to the International Assembly. The Presiding Bishop is ultimately selected by the International Assembly in a one-accord process. He is not appointed.
 - 25 2. General Presbyter. A General Presbyter, who in conjunction with the Presiding Bishop has oversight of a particular area of the world, is selected and confirmed by the International Presbytery according to the parameters outlined in the *Governance Manual of the International Presbytery*. His confirmation to that role is announced to the International Assembly. General Presbyters assist the Presiding Bishop in his respective duties, providing counsel and support. However, there is only one Presiding Bishop in this Church. Since a General Presbyter is not selected or confirmed by the International Assembly, the body of the General Presbytery is not the office of the Presiding Bishop. General Presbyters are selected, not appointed.

Appointed Leaders

26 Appointed leaders include all remaining leaders in the Church of God of Prophecy. Structurally, appointed leaders include International Offices Executive Directors and Trans-local Directors, National/Regional/State Bishops (N/R/S Bishops), Pastors, local leaders, and other staff.¹⁵ Appointments are made by the supervising leader while engaging in consultation.¹⁶

¹⁵ Please note that term limits, if accepted by the International Assembly, do not apply to national/regional/state staff/appointees, District Supervisors, Pastors, and local church staff and appointees.

¹⁶ *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 31.

Presbyteries

27 The governing structure of this Church, as approved by the International Assembly, is as follows: (1) International Assembly, (2) International Presbytery, and (3) General Presbytery.¹⁷ The International Assembly is the highest oversight body of this Church. The International Presbytery provides oversight of the General Presbytery. The General Presbytery is comprised of the Presiding Bishop and General Presbyters and provides day-to-day oversight as outlined by the International Assembly and International Presbytery.

International Presbytery

28 The International Presbytery is comprised of the Presiding Bishop, General Presbyters, National/Regional/State Bishops, the two Executive Directors at the International Offices, and Translocal Directors at the International Offices.¹⁸

General Presbytery

29 The General Presbytery is comprised of the Presiding Bishop and all General Presbyters.¹⁹

Summary of Selected and Appointed Leaders

30 There are two positional leader constructs in the Church of God of Prophecy. One is selected. The second is appointed. Leaders who are selected include only the PB and General Presbyters.

Leadership Succession in the Ecclesia

31 A discussion of leadership in the ecclesia encompasses the duration of tenure. Theoretically, open-ended tenure has been the practice by this Church for decades. The open-ended nature has been pragmatic, at best. While some may proffer that leadership succession stifles the leading of the Spirit, this is not the sentiment of the Committee. On the contrary, we believe that leadership succession provides the construct for the Spirit to lead by identifying gifted leaders who are capable.

32 Currently, an initial period of six years applies to the office of the Presiding Bishop. However, the rationale states that he is selected for an indefinite period, leaving the tenure completely open-ended. The initial period of service of a General Presbyter consists of four years. The designated time of service of appointed leaders (International Offices Directors, N/R/S Bishops, Pastors) is two years. Each of these

¹⁷ *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 8–20.

¹⁸ *Revised Governance Document July 16*, in the *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 125.

¹⁹ *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 19.

terms is theoretically open-ended. While the Committee applauds longevity, especially in the local pastorate, we must not ignore the potential for habituation, staleness, and a lack of fresh vision. That is, longevity alone, in any leadership role, does not guarantee productivity. Admittedly, a long-term leader can provide stability to an organization. However, stability unaccompanied by visionary leadership often results in calcification. “The culture of the church can stiffen, lessen[ing] the ability to change, become inwardly focused, and lose any missional momentum that was prevalent early in the . . . [leader’s] tenure.”²⁰ Additionally, the discipline of psychology and leadership theory informs us that human nature tends to preserve, protect, and insulate one’s status and position rather than be intentional about handing off the responsibility of leadership to a new leader.

33

To be sure, there is no mandate in Scripture for term limits. However, there is a mandate for leadership succession. In reality, leadership succession suggests that tenure is not only healthy for an organization, but it should also be normative. In the Old Testament economy, the Levites did seem to practice a form of tenure (Numbers 8:23–26). The two primary duties of the Levites included (1) the dismantling and reassembling of the movable tabernacle and (2) guard duty around the perimeters of the tabernacle.²¹ It is noteworthy that entry and exit ages for the Levites were not static. Age requirements changed from time to time and even from pre-exilic to post-exilic times (Numbers 4:3, 23, 30; 8:23–26; 1 Chronicles 23:24, 27; 2 Chronicles 31:17; Ezra 3:8). From these adjustments, one might infer that Israel was able to adjust the age requirements as was appropriate for the specific time and need. Commentator Timothy Ashley suggests that Israel may have “found that men of thirty years of age were generally more spiritually mature than men of twenty-five and that this spiritual maturity was necessary in the work of carrying the holy things (the job for which the age limits apply).”²²

34

While the BDP does not suggest the Levitical method as a prescriptive hermeneutic for a specified period of service in a particular office of the church, we do recognize the descriptive nature of the Levitical term limit. Since the Apostle Paul stated emphatically that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV), we should allow this passage at least to inform and contribute to our discussion of leadership succession. Again, we do not embrace Numbers as being prescriptive but descriptive. Yet, within the descriptive aspect, there is the admission that the practice of the Levites is worthy of reflection. Additionally, there simply seem to be certain latitudes for methods and models of leading afforded the people of God. This has certainly been the practice of this Church throughout our history. Models that served this Church well for a time have been replaced by fresher methods more appropriate for the seasons in which a particular generation leads. Every detail and leadership method

²⁰ William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 62.

²¹ Timothy R. Ashley, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Numbers*, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 174.

²² Ashley, *Book of Numbers*, 174.

is not succinctly outlined in Scripture. For instance, in 1983 in the 78th Assembly, the Questions and Subjects Committee (now the BDP) recommended the following:

35 Sensing the need for enhancing the stature of the office of bishop in the Church, we recommend that the minimum age for a bishop hereafter be set at age 30 [thirty]. “Not a novice” as mentioned by Paul as a requirement for this office would indicate the need for maturity. . . . Those who already have been licensed as bishops . . . would not be affected by this recommendation.²³

36 Accordingly, the Assembly approved the recommendation establishing a minimum age requirement for a bishop. Thirty years old continues to be the minimum age requirement for bishop ordination.²⁴ There is no scripture that can be cited to indicate this is the biblical age. Indeed, if we tried to cite one, we would be guilty of proof-texting. Consequently, while in matters of doctrine and theology, the Bible is certainly our rule of faith, when it comes to implementation of guidelines for leadership tenure, there does appear to be latitude granted to the people of God to make decisions based upon healthy organizational principles.

37 Consequently, age requirements and tenure are metrics adopted by the ecclesia and may evolve from time to time as the need and leadership culture dictate. Leadership succession affords present leaders a potential maximum period of leading in a particular role, allowing them to strategically plan not only for their leadership tenure but also for their transition. Additionally, it provides hope for next generation leaders who are gifted and in the process of becoming equipped for future leadership opportunities. Every arriving leader will one day be a leader who is departing. “It’s not a question of if, but when.”²⁵

38 Acceptance of life cycles and embracing the seasons of leadership are fundamental to the integrity of the *imago Dei*. Both the individual leader and the ecclesia can effectuate this goal, not only celebrating beginnings, but by also celebrating and normalizing endings. “Life is composed of life cycles and seasons. Nothing lasts forever. . . . When we accept that as a fundamental truth, we can align our actions with our feelings, our beliefs with our behaviors, to accept how things are.”²⁶

Leadership Pipeline

39 A leadership pipeline ensures a continuity of leadership, especially during seasons of transitions. When a healthy and robust leadership pipeline exists in an organization, it aids in the overall goal of leadership development. Consequently, the result becomes the developmental process of potential, emerging, and current leaders rather than simply leadership placement of warm bodies into vacant roles. When the

²³ *Minutes of the 78th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1983), 137.

²⁴ *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 104.

²⁵ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Pastoral Succession*, 137.

²⁶ Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 40–41.

“demand for leadership greatly exceeds the supply,”²⁷ a shift in intentional leadership development must occur. To achieve this goal, however, it requires the “creating and curating of a church or organization’s distinct culture.”²⁸ Integral to this process is a healthy discussion and implementation of succession planning. Succession planning is

40 the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another. Succession is when one senior leader intentionally transitions and hands over leadership to another. Succession planning is creating a plan for what will happen once you need a new leader, something all organizations face.²⁹

41 Leadership succession realizes that the principle of leadership and the position itself does not revolve around the personality of any one leader.

42 Specifically, the term “leadership pipeline” refers to the intentional strategy of recruiting and investing into potential, emerging, and current leaders to develop quality leadership traits and skills for leaders at all levels. Succession planning is incumbent on any institution that desires to be effective across generations. Accordingly, General Presbyters are obliged to identify, discern, and recruit current Pastors who may possess the effective potential to step into the role of National/Regional/State Bishop.³⁰ In fact, we conclude that a primary responsibility of any leader is to identify potential leaders, equip them, entrust them with responsibility, and ultimately provide them with the opportunity to serve even the position that the leader himself may currently occupy. This is leadership succession. Failure in this area is to fail as a leader. Leaders do more than occupy a position, they lead by handing off the position to gifted leaders who have become equipped to take the organization to the next level. The leadership position must outlast and outdistance the leader.

43 In leadership succession, next-generation N/R/S Bishops will need a process of equipping and training. Certainly, each General Presbyter will rely on his plurality team to assist in this process. In fact, we encourage more experienced National/Regional/State Bishops to be partnered with new appointees as mentors. Seasoned bishops will be able to provide a wealth of wisdom, experience, knowledge, and practical suggestions enabling newly appointed bishops to “grow horizontally through [these] alliances and partnerships.”³¹ However, we are certain that the leader primarily tasked with populating a leadership pipeline for future National/Regional/State Bishops is the General Presbyter. No other import is more fundamental than the ability to maintain a leadership pipeline populated by next-generation leaders. “Developing other leaders is,

²⁷ Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter, and James Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 1.

²⁸ Todd Adkins, *Creating and Curating a Recruiting Culture* (Nashville: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2018), 4.

²⁹ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Pastoral Succession*, 10.

³⁰ The “Role of the Overseer,” including responsibilities, principal function, his appointment, relationships, qualifications, administrative duties, supervisory duties, promotional duties, and appointive duties, are outlined in the *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 27–32.

³¹ Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *Leadership Pipeline*, 3.

or at least should be, a major part of every leader’s job.”³² The ability to effectively identify, discern, and recruit gifted leaders to assume oversight is crucial to the homeostasis of church leadership. As well, the ability of a General Presbyter to identify, discern, and recruit leaders who will likewise be effective as National/Regional/State Bishops authenticates the effectiveness of the General Presbyter as a leader himself. Paul counseled the young bishop, Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2 CSB). Leadership experts observe that an effective leader is often identified by the ability to attract, develop, and retain in the organization gifted people. This leadership principal acumen is evidenced as such “because the people working under that person [the leader] are of high caliber, are energized, and have a natural affinity for the leader and want to see him or her succeed.”³³

44

Finally, we caution that not every effective Pastor is necessarily called to the apostolic and administrative duties of a National/Regional/State Bishop. This does not lessen the value of the leader. The individual is an *imago Dei*. Leaders are simply called to differing roles. Just because an individual is effective in one aspect of leadership does not mean that he will be effective in a differing role of responsibility. Intentional development and strategic implementation of the leadership pipeline is crucial for the health of any organization.

Leadership Vacuum

45

A leadership vacuum occurs when there are more positions available than there are qualified and properly vetted potential individuals to fill those positions responsibly. Currently, there are approximately 100 bishops serving in the International Presbytery. According to demographics supplied to the BDP Committee by the office of the Presiding Bishop,³⁴ the average tenure of appointed offices is as follows:

Table TL.1. Tenure and age of N/R/S Bishops by general presbyterial areas
Demographic information provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop (May 11, 2023)

Position	Average Years Served	Longest Tenured Years	Shortest Tenured Years	Average Age	Youngest	Oldest	# age 70 plus
General Presbyter	10	25	1 (x2)*	62	54	70	1
Africa	14	25 (x2)	1(x2)	61	45 (x2)	75	1

³² Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *Leadership Pipeline*, 10.

³³ Charan, Drotter, and Noel, *Leadership Pipeline*, 47–48.

³⁴ The demographics of the International Presbytery was provided to the BDP by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, May 11, 2023.

Asia, Oceania	13	31	5	57	43	73	2
Caribbean, Atlantic Islands	13	31	3 (x2)	66	59	71	4
Central America, Mexico, Caribbean Spanish	10	31	1	61	52	74 (x2)	2
Europe, Middle East	11	25 (x2)	3 (x2)	55	41	69	0
North America	12	49	1(x7)	62	45	73 (x2)	5
South America**	14	31	2	56	43	67	0

*x2 means there are two bishops who match this numerical value

**Continental Education Director included in demographics of South America

46

Based upon this information, it is conceivable that in a construct of leadership succession and tenure, one-third to one-half of N/R/S Bishops could be rotated in a given Assembly appointment year. This high percentage of leadership transition, in one calendar year, has the potential of negatively affecting the homeostasis of leadership continuity and the overall progress of the Church. To avert the possibility of a leadership vacuum and to ensure homeostasis, it is the conclusion of this Committee that the implementation of the principle of leadership succession should be incremental. The first implementation is to selected leaders from the International Presbytery (PB and GPs), Executive Directors at the International Offices, and Standing Assembly Committee members. Once this implementation is completed and applied to the PB, GPs, Executive Directors, and committee members, additional knowledge and fresh insights, inclusive of both challenges and successes of tenure, may be gathered and then applied to the implementation of tenure to N/R/S Bishops. The incremental and specific implementation approach not only addresses the homeostasis and leadership vacuum, but it also provides for a period of intentional formation for a leadership pipeline supply that identifies, educates, equips, and mentors potential leaders for future leadership roles. Below is a graph indicating the ages of N/R/S Bishops currently serving under appointment by General Presbyterial areas.

Table TL.2 Age categorization of N/R/S Bishops by general presbyterial areas (2023)

Position	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
General Presbyter		3	3	1
Africa	2	5	11	1
Asia/Oceania	4	2	5	2
Caribbean/Atlantic Islands	0	1	4	4
Central America, Mexico, Spanish Caribbean	0	6	2	2
Europe, Middle East	2	4	3	0
North America	2	7	12	5
South America	2	5	4	0

Note: The Presiding Bishop is not included in this demographic chart.

Incremental and Specific Implementation

47

In an effort to apply leadership succession incrementally to ensure a healthy homeostasis of leadership at all levels, an intentional strategy should be employed. Consequently, applying the process of tenure to the smallest ratio of leaders, with ongoing subsequent assessments, and then moving to the larger population of leaders is most appropriate. In both a hierarchical and visible approach affecting the smallest ratio of leaders, the impact and assessment can be best measured with the goal of ensuring homeostasis. The ultimate goal is that leadership succession will be applicable to both selected and appointed leaders.

48

The following table indicates the population size of the various leadership positions in which tenure is to ultimately apply.

Table TL.3. Numerical composition of the International Presbytery and Assembly Standing Committees/Board

Leader	Number
● Presiding Bishop	1
● General Presbyters	7
● International Offices Executive Directors	2

● Trans-local Directors	6* (may vary)
● National/State/Regional Bishops	100+ (may vary)
Assembly Standing Committees	
● Biblical Doctrine and Polity	8
● Corporate Board of Directors	12
● Finance and Stewardship	8

*This number may vary based upon appointments, consolidations and/or additions of departmental ministries.

49

Consequently, this report will recommend that maximum years of service in a particular assignment be first applied to the office of the Presiding Bishop (1), the General Presbyters (7), Assembly Standing Committees, and International Offices Executive Directors, with ongoing assessments to be made by the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee. Once the assessments are completed, the BDP may then recommend a secondary implementation of tenure to the International Assembly for Trans-local Directors at the International Offices and National/Regional/State Bishops, respectively.

Exit Strategy

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No matter how gifted, effective, and articulate a leader may be, every leader will transition out of his/her present role. The implementation and management of leadership succession in a healthy and productive manner elicits the consideration of the leader’s departure from a particular office/role. In this context, exit does not necessarily imply retirement from a public leadership role, although depending upon one’s age and personal preference, exit and retirement could conceivably coincide. However, it is very likely that in a substantial number of instances, a particular leader who has fulfilled his/her tenure will have continued gifts, talents, and years to offer in service to the Lord and this Church in an appointed role of leadership. In the rotation process of implementing the guidelines of leadership succession, individuals serving in either a selected or appointed role should be able to actively, strategically, and with dignity serve the continued leadership needs of this Church.

51

A healthy focus of an exit strategy requires the participation of the leader, the leader’s supervisor, the International Presbytery, and the wider ecclesial community. Exit strategy does not begin in the final months or even the final year of a leader’s tenure in a particular assignment. *Exit strategy begins on the first day the individual assumes a new assignment.* In fact, it should predate a new assignment. Leadership succession presupposes that there will be a day where the individual will no longer serve in a particular assigned role. Every leader, whatever his or her position, is an interim

leader.³⁵ Leaders have predecessors and successors. *Wise leaders plan for the day when they will transition from one positional role to another.* One occupies an office. One does not own the office.

52 Consequently, exit strategy requires that while the individual leader fulfills his/her duty in an assigned role with dignity, passion, and faithfulness, the leader must recognize his or her personhood as an *imago Dei* beyond the identity and conflation of a particular role. Accordingly, a leader is a person of value and worth not because of his/her title or leadership role; he/she is a person of value and worth because he or she is an *imago Dei*. Our identities, value, and self-worth must not be enmeshed with an assigned role. There is calling, valuable contributions, leadership opportunities, anointing, and purpose prior to any specific appointed or selected leadership role. There will be a continuation of these same personal qualities following one's fulfillment of a particular assignment. In other words, the office must not create the value of the leader. The leader has intrinsic worth, not the office, per se.

53 With that being said, the Church of God of Prophecy has an ethical responsibility to intentionally create a system of appreciation and opportunity for significant continued service to those individuals who have willingly offered their time, talents, and service in strategic leadership assignments in this Church. Consequently, *exit strategy must not only be the responsibility of the individual, exit strategy must also be the obligation of the institution, the ecclesia.* In many cases, leaders did not go through any type of application process, as is common in business/professional environments. Leaders with supervising responsibilities recognized qualities within the leader, which matched the current need of the assignment, and requested the individual to leave their existing role of leadership in order to assume a new assignment. Because of their love, devotion, and willingness to advance the gospel and the mission of this Church, many willingly accepted assignments, relocated family, and even received a lower financial package to accept, and in some cases submit to, the request of those over them in the Lord or from the greater ecclesia. In some cases, these assignments have been more difficult than previous assignments. In other cases, these assignments have resulted in leaders having "hazarded their lives" (Acts 15:26).

54 Peter's response to the Lord, "we have left all to follow you" (Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28), could be echoed by many who have faithfully served the leadership needs of this Church. Consequently, it is a matter of integrity and dignity that this Church engage in a process of exit strategy that recognizes faithful service, provides the opportunity for continued service, and considers the financial needs of leaders transitioning while proceeding with grace and dignity. The New Testament principle of "one another" applies here without question. "Love one another" (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12; 2 John 1:5). "Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10 NIV). "Have equal concern for each other" (1 Corinthians 12:25 NIV). "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2 NIV). "Encourage one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25). "Love each other

³⁵ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Pastoral Succession*, 9.

deeply” (1 Peter 4:8 NIV). No leader in this Church should justifiably feel that their service has been a utilitarian expedient and that they are no longer valued by this ecclesial community when their tenure is fulfilled in any appointed or selected position. Our Church culture must embrace the worth of the individual. Jesus succinctly stated this principle in what is traditionally called the Sermon on the Mount. “Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12 CSB). This biblical injunction should govern the Church’s creation of a healthy exit strategy of leaders. This requires that transitioning leaders be given ample time to prepare for the next path in their leadership journey.

55

Additionally, it is incumbent upon the leader him/herself to be intentional in constructing a personalized exit strategy. In other words, a leader should not simply relegate his/her exit from positional leadership to the organization. Leaders should plan and prepare for their own exit from an appointed and/or selected position in this organization. A personalized intentional approach not only includes a financial plan, but a strategic overview that puts in place a conceived exit from positional leadership. The exit strategy may include rotation to another appointed role in which the leader will find creative and fulfilling ways to continue to minister and effectively lead within this Church by utilizing his/her talents and giftings. Opportunity for continued service within this Church should be made available to proven leaders who transition/rotate from a positional leadership role into another. Second, the completion of a specified tenure may include retirement. Retirement from positional leadership responsibilities should be celebrated in this Church and not viewed negatively. On the note of retirement from full-time Christian leadership service, Christian professor Gary M. Burge observes,

56

Many factors weigh into the retirement decision: finances, health (mental and physical), job satisfaction, general vitality, interest and other opportunities that may be calling us elsewhere. The calculus in the decision always has to take these into account and is never easy. For some, early retirement might be best. Others are effective till they are seventy or more.³⁶

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Burge’s noble counsel to those considering retirement from teaching in a Christian educational institution is also instructive for those in any type of Christian leadership, including church and ministerial leadership. He continues his sage advice by urging his colleagues and Christian leaders to

58

retire before you have to retire. . . . Retiring before you have to retire means students and colleagues will miss you, they will not breathe a sigh of relief. There will be a celebration, and you will feel fit to get on with something new and interesting. But what is true about effectiveness is doubly true about health. We want to bring our healthiest selves into retirement.³⁷

³⁶ Gary M. Burge, *Mapping Your Academic Career: Charting the Course of a Professor’s Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 126–127.

³⁷ Burge, *Mapping Your Academic Career*, 128–129.

59 A denominational study discovered that only one out of every four Pastors (25%) had developed plans for a full retirement. Additionally, an additional one out of every four (27%) indicated that they did not plan to retire at all. The reality, however, is that even when Pastors desire to retire, or are forced to retire because of failing health, many have not planned well for retirement.³⁸ Consequently, we encourage all leaders to engage a reputable financial planning firm/advisor in preparing for inevitable life cycles. The Church of God of Prophecy offers a retirement plan to which both the leader and the ministry he/she serves may contribute.

60 The reality is that leadership transitions are challenging and involve many differing variables. Transitions are not “cookie cutter” processes as each individual leader will deal with emotional, leadership, and financial nuances. However, a combined strategy for transition and/or retirement, both by the leader and the Church of God of Prophecy, can assist in mitigating these challenges. The goal should be to transition with dignity and grace. Those tasked with overseeing leadership changes are to regard and treat others as they desire to be regarded and treated. The guiding principle for transition should be: “Am I treating this leader the way I want to be treated when I transition?” Again, each of us is an interim leader. None of us will outlast the organization.

Recommendations for Leadership Succession—Phase One

61 We offer the following recommendations for consideration and the collective wisdom of the International Assembly with respect to leadership succession with the caveat that the implementation will be incremental.

62 1. Recommendation of Leadership Succession for the Office of the Presiding Bishop

63 A Presiding Bishop’s first term shall be for six years, with the possibility of a second term of four years allowing for a potential maximum tenure of ten years. Ten years is the maximum, not the guarantee upon selection to the office of Presiding Bishop. The tenure of ten years applies to PBs selected from 2022 forward.

64 The PB is selected and installed for a period of six years. **During the fifth year of his tenure**, the Presiding Bishop shall be evaluated by the members of the International Presbytery, according to the directive of the *Ministry Policy Manual*, in accordance with the parameters of the *Governance Manual*. At the conclusion of the evaluative process and the subsequent decision of the IP, the Presiding Bishop may be reaffirmed by the IP for an additional period of four years. In such case, the IP will present the Presiding Bishop to the IA for its approval and installation for an additional four years. The International Assembly is the entity to approve and install the Presiding Bishop.

³⁸ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Pastoral Succession*, 12.

65

The rationale for a maximum of ten years is based upon the following historical information of the tenure of General Overseer/Presiding Bishop:

- A. J. Tomlinson 1903–1943
- M. A. Tomlinson 1943–1990
- Billy D. Murray 1990–2000
- Fred S. Fisher, Sr. 2000–2006
- Randall E. Howard 2006–2013
- Sam N. Clements 2014 to 2022
- Timothy Coalter 2022 to present

66

A pattern has emerged over the most recent four completed administrations of General Overseer (Murray to Clements) that the longest serving has been for a ten-year tenure, i.e., Billy Murray. We believe that this evolution of a decade of service in this office is a good pattern to adopt as having been Spirit-led. Jesus stated that “the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 ESV). We believe it is incumbent upon any people who are Spirit-led to both notice and discern patterns of development where the Spirit might indeed be influencing and hovering over our deliberations and decisions. In the Jerusalem Council, James adjudicated that the decision by the council “seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28, NKJV).

67

One of the challenges that has surfaced during past administrations is the issue of an open-ended tenure. Specifically, this was a concern voiced by leaders during earlier administrations. By providing a tenure of service in the attitude of leadership succession, the Presiding Bishop can work within the framework of a beginning and ending period.

68

A PB is not obligated to serve ten years. He may elect to serve only one term or a portion of the maximum ten years. Additionally, the IP may decide to not reaffirm the sitting PB for consideration to continue as the PB for a second term.

69

In the event of a global, continental, or expansive regional upheaval due to a pandemic, war, extreme disaster, or if a new PB cannot be discerned at the end of ten years of service by the present PB, the PB’s tenure may be extended up to two years beyond the prescribed timeframe. However, the General Presbyters will need to recommend the extension in consultation with and guidance by the BDP. The recommendation will then be made to the International Presbytery and will be considered ratified with one-accord support of expressions made by the IP. If the International Assembly convenes in this same year, the Assembly would either approve or not approve the recommendation for the PB to continue for an additional two years. If, because of extenuating circumstances, the International Assembly does not convene in said year, the ratification by the IP will be sufficient.

70

Upon leaving the office of PB, consideration may be given to a PB to transition to a National/Regional/State Bishop or to a local pastorate. He should not make an immediate transition to an appointed role as either an Executive Director or a Trans-local Director at the International Offices, or General Presbyter. A transitioning PB should not appoint himself to any position upon his transition.

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Candidates who are considered by the members of the International Presbytery for selection to the office of Presiding Bishop should have, at minimum, five (5) years of faithful lead pastoral experience, with an additional minimum of five (5) years of faithful experience as a National, Regional, or State Bishop. The above-stated experience is the norm for candidates for the office of PB. There may be a rare and unique extenuating circumstance in which a candidate may not have the above-stated experience. In this event, the potential candidate would need to have proven exceptional leadership, and the concession is to be recommended by the General Presbyters in consultation with and guidance by the BDP Committee. If agreed upon, the candidate may then be vetted and proceed in the qualifying process for consideration by the IP. Again, this provision would be rare and not normative.

72

2. Recommendation of Leadership Succession for the Office of General Presbyter

73

a. Tenure for Newly Selected General Presbyters in 2024 and Beyond

A GP's term shall be for four years with a maximum tenure of three (3) four-year terms, or twelve years in total. A GP is selected and installed for a term of four years. In the third year of his service, the General Presbyter shall be evaluated by the Bishops under his direct oversight (N/R/S bishops) and by the members of the International Presbytery and Executive Directors according to the directives of the *Ministry Policy Manual*, per the parameters of the *Governance Manual*. After the evaluative process and the subsequent decision of the IP, a GP may be reaffirmed by the IP for an additional term of four years, with a maximum of twelve years of service.

74

The tenure of a GP is not a cumulative effect of selected or appointed leadership. The maximum of twelve (12) years applies only to the time he has served in the office of GP. Years served in other selected and appointed positions do not apply to the twelve-year, three-term maximum. The tenure provision of three terms (twelve-year maximum) becomes effective immediately with the acceptance of this report and applies to GPs selected in 2024 and forward.

75

A GP is not obligated to serve twelve years. He may elect to serve only one term or a portion of the maximum allotted years. Additionally, the IP may elect not to reaffirm a GP for consideration to continue as a GP for a second or third term.

Concerning leadership succession, a GP may transition to either a local pastorate or a National, Regional, or State Bishop. Consideration may be given to the transitioning GP to become a N/R/S Bishop or a local Pastor. A transitioning GP should not appoint himself as an N/R/S Bishop. The appointment decision is left to the discretion of the incoming General Presbyter, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyter's plurality leadership. Also, he may become an Executive Director or Trans-local Director at the IO upon appointment by the Presiding Bishop. He should not, however, actively seek such appointments from the PB and/or GP colleagues. Additionally, all candidates who are considered by the members of the International Presbytery for selection to the office of General Presbyter should have, at minimum, five (5) years of faithful lead pastoral experience, with an additional minimum five (5) years of faithful experience as a National, Regional, or State Bishop. There may be a rare and unique extenuating circumstance in which a candidate may not have the above stated experience. In this event, the potential candidate would need to have proven exceptional leadership, and the concession is to be recommended by the N/R/S Bishops of a particular area, in consultation with the General Presbyters and guidance by the BDP Committee. If agreed upon, the candidate may then be vetted and proceed in the qualifying process for consideration by the IP. Again, this provision would be rare and not normative.

In the event of a global, continental, or expansive regional upheaval due to a pandemic, war, extreme disaster, or if a leader cannot be discerned for a particular area and the transition threatens to pose a significant adverse effect on the continuity and cohesiveness of a GP's area, a GP's term may be extended up to two years (one time only) beyond the prescribed years. However, the General Presbytery will need to recommend the extension in consultation with and guidance by the BDP. The recommendation will then be made to the General Presbyter's area for approval and will be considered ratified with an eighty percent (80%) support of expressions made by the General Presbyter's area. [NOTE: this percentage is given for this particular scenario and should not be adjudicated as the standard for one-accord decisions.] This extension will then proceed to the International Presbytery for final approval following the agreed upon guidelines of the IP *Governance Manual*.

Please Note: Pastoral experience does not apply to current General Presbyters. These requirements do apply to all General Presbyters selected from 2024 forward.

79

b. Tenure for Current General Presbyters

Leadership succession/tenure will begin to apply to General Presbyters selected and installed prior to 2024 with the following criteria:

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i. General Presbyters who have served 20+ years (2024) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP in 2026, in accordance with tenure.

81

ii. General Presbyters who have served 16–20+ years (2024) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP in 2028. [NOTE: The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during a prescribed evaluation process as outlined by the *Governance Manual* of the International Presbytery.]

82

iii. General Presbyters who have served 12–15 years (2024) in their respective role as General Presbyter will conclude their service as a GP in 2030. [NOTE: The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during a prescribed evaluation process as outlined by the *Governance Manual* of the International Presbytery.]

83

iv. General Presbyters who have served 8–11 years (2024) in their respective role will conclude their service as a GP in 2032. [NOTE: The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during a prescribed evaluation process as outlined by the *Governance Manual* of the International Presbytery.]

84

v. General Presbyters who have served two years or less (2024) in their respective role will conclude their service as a GP in 2036. [NOTE: The provision applies only if the GP is reapproved to serve during a prescribed evaluation process as outlined by the *Governance Manual* of the International Presbytery.]

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vi. NOTE: As alluded to above, the projected dates apply to General Presbyters as long as they are evaluated and re-endorsed by the International Presbytery. It is conceivable that a GP may not be re-approved prior to an above projected date. In that case, the General Presbyter's tenure will conclude at the time of not being re-approved. With respect to leadership succession, a current GP may transition to either a local pastorate or a National, Regional, or State Bishop; however, in this event, he should not actively seek such an appointment as a N/R/S Bishop. The appointment decision is left to the discretion of the incoming General Presbyter, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyter's leadership team (GP plurality team or corporate board). A transitioning GP should not appoint himself as a National/Regional/State Bishop.

86

The calculus provides ***all current GPs an exemption*** from the three-term or twelve-year maximum service. Depending on when a General Presbyter was first confirmed and the current length of his tenure, the exemption provides for a potential continuum of service as a General Presbyter. On the lower end of the continuum, it is fourteen (14) years. The highest end of the continuum is thirty years (30) years.

87

3. Recommendation of Leadership Succession of Standing Assembly Committees

The recommendations in this section apply to all Standing Assembly Committees unless otherwise noted. Standing Assembly Committees³⁹ as stipulated by the International Assembly are as follows:

- Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP)
- Corporate Board of Directors (CBD) (Formerly known as Administrative Committee)
- Finance and Stewardship (F&S)

88

a. Tenure for Newly Appointed Committee Members in 2024 and Beyond

Committee members may serve a continuous consecutive term of five terms (two-year appointment term) for a total of ten years on the same committee/board. Once a member no longer serves on a committee or board, the committee/board member should not serve on any Assembly standing committee (F&S, BDP, CBD) for a full term (two years). After the two-year rest period, an individual may serve on another committee or board. To return to the same committee or board, the individual is to have a four-year (or two-term) hiatus. No person may serve concurrently on two or more Standing Assembly Committees.

89

Note regarding the constituency of the Corporate Board: The Corporate Board composition is to have equal representation of members who (1) serve as General Presbyters and/or Executive Directors, or others at the International Offices and (2) those who serve as a local Pastor, National/Regional/State Bishop, or another leadership capacity. As an example, if the General Presbytery and International Offices are represented by seven (7) board members, an equal number of seven (7) must come from outside the General Presbytery and International Offices. The above example is not the total limit of board members (14) permitted but is offered for illustrative purposes. The Corporate Board is to also follow the

³⁹ *Ministry Policy Manual* (2018), 10–15. For a description of Assembly Standing Committees and their responsibilities, see the above reference. Additionally, the *MPM* will be updated to reflect any approval of the above recommendations that may be accepted by the International Assembly.

transition and tenure of all its members as indicated in this report of Assembly Standing Committees.

90 b. Tenure for Current Committee Members (BDP, F&S, and CBD)

Leadership Succession will begin to apply to committee members serving prior to 2024 as follows: The following are the criteria for the **tenure of current Assembly committee** members.

- 91 i. Committee members who have served 12+ years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2026.
- 92 ii. Committee members who have served 10–11 years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2028.
- 93 iii. Committee members who have served 8–9 years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2030.
- 94 iv. Committee members who have served 6–7 years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2032.
- 95 v. Committee members who have served 4–5 years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2034.
- 96 vi. Committee members who have served 1–2 years (2024) in their respective appointment will conclude their service as a committee member in 2036.
- 97 vii. NOTE: All committee members serve at the appointment of the Presiding Bishop. The above formula is not a guarantee of appointed years of service. The formula indicates maximum years permitted.

98 4. Recommendation of Exit Strategy Focus

We recommend that the Finance and Stewardship Committee provide an intentional strategy of a financial remuneration for those having served in an appointed/selected leadership role as it relates to Presiding Bishop, General Presbyters, and Executive Directors.

99 We recommend that the F&S Committee and the Corporate Board of Directors collaborate with the BDP on exit strategy goals. The collaborative effort is to afford that the spirit and the parameters of exit strategy, both in this report and the intent of the BDP Committee, are assured. Consequently, the exit strategy will not be left simply to the discretion of the F&S or the Corporate Board. Exit strategy and its implementation will be a joint decision with the BDP shepherding and leading the process as polity is the responsibility of the BDP

Committee. Collaboration is the valued goal here rather than creating a silo territorial response. We are better and stronger when we work together, and our leaders will be better cared for as we work together in this effort.

100

5. Guiding Principle

The Church of God of Prophecy is unapologetically a movement and people of the Spirit. The mission statement of this Church stipulates that “the Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.” Accordingly, we embrace the empowering Spirit baptism of believers and the continuation of the charismata. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6 ASV). The variegated nature of the *charismata* administered by the Holy Spirit orients the *ecclesia* towards a *pneumadynamic* life and ministry. “Created, gathered, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,”⁴⁰ the Church then fully embraces not only being Spirit-filled but being Spirit-led. Policy and politics are guidelines to provide both assistance and protection in the proper administration of responsibilities and ministries, while providing standards of accountability and accepted practice. Yet we must always be sensitive and flexible to the leading of the Spirit as discerned in the dynamic of a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6).

101

The metrics and formulas contained in this document are intended to assist in the discernment process of leadership giftings and anointing. If accepted by this Assembly, the parameters and guidelines for tenure in this document are formalized and become our practice. However, in every decision, it is unmistakably the desire of this Committee and this Church to discern the will of God as we fully rely upon the Holy Spirit. While we should seek to follow these guidelines for leadership succession, we welcome the Holy Spirit to lead in all matters. The Holy Spirit, like the wind, cannot be contained. Jesus stated, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 ESV). Additionally, we are instructed in Scripture to be flexible:

102

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved. (Matthew 9:16–17 NKJV)

103

God is sovereign, and polity does not preempt divine intervention when biblically and supernaturally discerned. “The church is not constituted by human intentions, activities and institutional or structural forms, but by the action of the

⁴⁰ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 117.

trine God, realized in the Son and Spirit.”⁴¹ We, therefore, recognize both divine and human ecclesial action. Indeed, the Spirit works within human abilities. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV). John Webster articulates that “divine action is sheerly creative, uncaused, spontaneous, saving and effectual; human, churchly action is derivative, contingent and indicative.”⁴² Consequently, there are structures and polities that are humanly inculcated into the life of the church, which should not necessarily be considered devoid of the unction of the Spirit. Admittedly, there may be moments when the church discerns the Spirit leading beyond the parameters of a particular stated policy. Should the International Presbytery, in session, discern in one-accord that a sitting Presiding Bishop should continue for a one-time extension of two years, and should said Presiding Bishop agree with that discernment, the IP is then at liberty to bring this discernment to the Assembly floor. The International Assembly would then either ratify or not ratify that discernment in the biblical dynamic of a multitude of counselors for a clearly specified period of continued service. This discernment by the Church and continuation of a sitting Presiding Bishop is understood to be directed uniquely by the Spirit and not become the norm for a Presiding Bishop to continue in office beyond the indicated term.

Assessment Recommendation in Preparation for Phase Two

104

This review, report, and recommendations are a collected and collaborated effort. Assessments are not currently offered due to the reality that the discussion regarding leadership succession is in the initial stage of potential implementation. Should the International Assembly approve the recommendations to adopt Phase One,

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1. We recommend that the BDP Committee be commissioned with the responsibility of assessment and adjustments as needed going forward. Additionally, the BDP will be commissioned to engage the ongoing assessment and accountability process. This recommendation includes the BDP engaging in a thorough study and assessment once Phase One has been implemented and the completion of Phase One has occurred. After the completion of Phase One in 2034, the BDP should finalize their assessment, the study of ecclesial homeostasis, development of a leadership pipeline, and the implementation of a positive exit strategy as it relates to Phase One. As in any assessment and study, both the positive and/or negative implications of Phase One should be specifically identified and thoroughly discussed. The purpose of the study is to identify how tenure may affect the overall health and homeostasis of the Church of God of Prophecy in general, organizational and leadership structures, and leaders. Assessment will accompany the incremental implementation of tenure and the

⁴¹ John Webster, “The Self-Organizing Power of the Gospel: Episcopacy and Community Formation,” in *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 195.

⁴² Webster, “Self-Organizing Power of the Gospel,” 196.

process of going forward with the goal to apply leadership succession to National/Regional/State Bishops. Incremental implementation is essential to ensure that a significant number of transitions from the IP does not occur in an Assembly-year cycle. If the BDP in their deliberations deem it appropriate, they may then bring to the 2036 International Assembly (or a subsequent Assembly if more time is needed) a recommendation for leadership succession, rationale, and specifics for National/Regional/State Bishops, and for Executive Directors at the International Offices. This recommendation does not require the BDP to make said recommendation. It provides for the possibility.

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2. The exit strategy recommendations of this report will also apply to N/R/S Bishops should the BDP recommend, and a future Assembly approve, Phase Two of leadership succession. Consequently, we recommend that the F&S begin the process of a calculus for a financial remuneration for N/R/S Bishops, given the above stated parameters, for implementation of leadership succession to N/R/S Bishops.

Section Three

Studies and Recommendations on the Sacraments (Ordinances)

The Lord's Supper: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives

Introduction

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In 2015, the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee embarked upon a major undertaking to engage in “an intensive and thorough study of the sacraments.” We were strongly convinced that “we desperately needed to recover a biblical, doctrinal, historical, and practical working knowledge of the sacraments. We discerned the need to help inspire and encourage more sacred, faithful, and frequent participation of the sacraments in our churches. . . .”⁴³ The first document in the series, “The Sacrament of Footwashing,” was presented to the International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy in 2018. We now humbly present to the 102nd International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy the second document in the series, “The Lord's Supper: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives.”

⁴³ Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity of the Church of God of Prophecy, “Introduction and Rationale for the Study of the Sacraments of the Church,” *Business Acts of the 100th International Assembly* (Church of God of Prophecy, 2018), 11.

About Ordinances and Sacraments

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Throughout its history, the Church of God of Prophecy, like most Pentecostals, has referred to the sacred acts of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Footwashing as "ordinances." Nevertheless, all Classic Pentecostals do not uniformly use the same terminology for these practices.⁴⁴ One definition of "ordinance" is "a prescribed usage, practice, or ceremony."⁴⁵ A synonym for ordinance is "command."⁴⁶ Indeed, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Footwashing are practices of the Church that have been commanded by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15–16; Matthew 26:26–27; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17, 19–20; John 13:12–15; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). Therefore, these sacred acts can rightfully be referred to as ordinances in this context.

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A sacrament is "a Christian rite (such as baptism or the Eucharist) that is believed to have been ordained by Christ, and that is held to be a means of divine grace or a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality."⁴⁷ Jesus Christ gave both Baptism and the Lord's Supper to the early church as a means to bring believers "into communion with his death and resurrection, and thus with himself through the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–5; 1 Corinthians 11:23–27; Col. 2:11–12). These sacred acts are "the visible enactment of the word proclaimed in the kerygma, and their significance should be understood as such."⁴⁸ It is inevitable, then, that in time, these sacred acts should come to be regarded as "giving fellowship in the same *mystērion* [mystery] of the Word made flesh (I Tim. 3:16), and should be interpreted as themselves partaking in the mystery of the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:32)."⁴⁹ The Latin word *sacramentum* later became the prominent word, replacing *mystērion*, used in reference to sacred rites, which became known as *sacramenta*, or sacraments, or things "set apart as sacred." This concept impacted the meaning of the sacred rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in that they became "regarded as conveying grace in themselves, rather than as relating men through faith in Christ."⁵⁰

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Augustine later nuanced the meaning of sacrament "as a 'visible word' or an 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.'"⁵¹ This definition is much closer to the Protestant/Evangelical/Pentecostal understanding of the sacraments. For most Pentecostals, sacraments are "external rites directed by Scripture and observed

⁴⁴ Harold D. Hunter, "Ordinances, Pentecostal," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 947.

⁴⁵ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "Ordinance," accessed October 5, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ordinance>.

⁴⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Ordinance," accessed October 5, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=ordinance>.

⁴⁷ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "Sacrament," accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrament>.

⁴⁸ R. S. Wallace, "Sacrament," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 965.

⁴⁹ Wallace, "Sacrament," 965.

⁵⁰ Wallace, "Sacrament," 965.

⁵¹ Wallace, "Sacrament," 965.

by the gathered people of God.”⁵² In Pentecostal circles, “sacrament” is used “in a cognitive/symbolic way, rather than in the causal way that might suggest that salvation is conveyed *ex opere operato* [by the work done⁵³], through the administration of the sacrament.”⁵⁴

111 While Pentecostalism has traditionally and formally eschewed anything associated with sacramentality, early publications within the movement reveal that Pentecostals have historically engaged in sacramental thought and practice. Outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace are abundantly present in Pentecostal practice. We anoint the sick with oil, laying hands on them in prayer, and expect physical and spiritual healing (James 5:14–15; Mark 6:13). We anoint cloths to be sent to the sick, and by laying these cloths upon them, we expect their healing (Acts 19:12). We ordain those who have been called by God for ministry, laying hands upon them, praying, and expecting the Holy Spirit to impart to them spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Timothy 4:14). We baptize converts in water so that their obedience to Christ, and their confession in and identity with him might confirm and strengthen their confession (Romans 6:4; 1 Peter 3:21). Some Pentecostal and Charismatic theologians even consider tongues in sacramental terms. Frank D. Macchia writes:

112 Some theologians refer to sacraments as "signs". . . as the ritual means by which God embraces believers and makes the divine grace and love present to experience. Thus, some have viewed the term "sign," especially as defined sacramentally, as a way of describing tongues. . . . In part, the "sacramental" understanding of tongues seeks to account for the integral connection between the potential depth and breadth of the Spirit baptismal experience and the symbolic expression of tongues. . . .⁵⁵

113 In other words, speaking in tongues is an outward (and audible) sign of an inward operational grace of the Holy Spirit and can, therefore, be understood sacramentally.

114 When we wash each other’s feet, we receive the blessing of God’s favor and learn humility and servanthood from Christ’s example (John 13:12–17). We eat the bread and drink the cup of Communion to enjoy spiritual fellowship with Christ and his body, the church (1 Corinthians 10:16–17). Throughout the history of the Pentecostal movement, these and other outward actions have been done in expectation of inward and outward manifestations of God through the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals have observed these sacred practices as ways of “encountering and imitating the risen Jesus and mediation of the grace of divine transformative presence. These rites were never merely

⁵² Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” 947.

⁵³ “Ex Opera Operato,” The Episcopal Church, from *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, ed. Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2000), accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/ex-opere-operato/>.

⁵⁴ Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” 947.

⁵⁵ Frank D. Macchia, *Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Experience*, PDF file, accessed October 17, 2023, <https://www.aptspress.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/98-2-macchia.pdf>.

ceremonial or memorialistic, although their rich symbolism was not lost on the practitioners.”⁵⁶

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I. Terminology

The night before his betrayal, suffering, and death, Jesus earnestly desired to celebrate his last Passover meal with his disciples. At the end of this meal, Jesus instituted another meal to be celebrated among gathered Christian believers until his Second Coming. Christians use the following terms to refer to this meal:

116

- **The Lord’s Supper** calls to memory the suffering and death on the cross of our Lord Jesus and the sobriety surrounding the evening of the institution of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20).

117

- **Communion** places emphasis on the participation in the broken body and the blood of Christ shared among the worshipping community (1 Corinthians 10:16).

118

- **Eucharist** means “giving thanks.” In preparing and celebrating the meal, the minister and gathered believers thank God for sending his Son to give his life for the forgiveness of sins and our salvation (1 Corinthians 11:24).

119

- **Breaking of the Bread** emphasizes the presence of our resurrected Lord in celebrating the meal at the Lord’s Table. Breaking the bread is reflective of Christ’s actions in breaking and distributing the bread to his disciples in his post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. In the celebration of the meal, breaking the bread is an identifying sign of the Lord’s presence (Acts 2:42, 46).⁵⁷

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II. The Passover Seder: The Context for the Institution of the Lord’s Supper

Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the evening he celebrated the Passover with his disciples for the last time before his death on the cross (Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23; John 13:1–2). Jesus was an observant Jew and would have been accustomed to celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem with his family since childhood (Luke 2:41).

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The Passover is a seven-day⁵⁸ springtime festival celebrating the liberation of the children of Israel after four hundred years of slavery in Egypt,

⁵⁶ Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 177–178.

⁵⁷ Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 3, *The Renewal of Sunday Worship* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993), 252; Chris E. W. Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 210–217.

⁵⁸ Some Jews extend the festival to eight days. See Wayne Dosick, *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 162, 167, 173–174.

as recorded in Exodus 12–14.⁵⁹ The Passover Seder (meal) is observed on the first evening of the Passover festival. Each celebration has three focuses: past, present, and future.

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The Past

The Passover is a celebration of the remembrance of the mighty acts of God in the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt and from the death of the firstborn male of each household that had not smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. So, the Passover is a remembrance and celebration of a past historical event.

123

The Present

In celebrating the Passover, each participant places himself/herself in the narrative as if he/she had been freed from Egypt. This involves both a personal and corporate connection with the people and events remembered in the Passover and a celebration of the continuing benefits of that deliverance.⁶⁰

124

The Future

After the Passover meal (Seder), participants proclaim, “Next year in Jerusalem!” For almost 2,000 years, the Jews of the Diaspora prayed that, just as the children of Israel had wandered forty years in the wilderness and were finally brought to the Promised Land, they too would return to the land of Israel. Their prayer was answered by establishing the modern State of Israel in 1948.⁶¹

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Additionally, the proclamation, “Next year in Jerusalem!” expresses the hope and prayer of ultimate redemption, for “‘Jerusalem’ has come to mean not only the earthly city of Jerusalem but signifies an ‘eternal Jerusalem,’ a symbol of ultimate peace and perfection.”⁶² This is a concept in both Judaism and Christianity (see Revelation 21:9–27).

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Jesus emphatically expressed his desire to celebrate his last Passover meal with his disciples (Luke 22:14–16). According to the tradition, Jesus would have shared the seder of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs with his disciples (Exodus 12:5–8).

127

The setting and context of the institution of the supper were not arbitrary or coincidental. On the contrary, the biblical record that encompasses the Passover event, the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12–14), and the annual celebration of the Passover Seder by the Jews foreshadow Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper and its celebration by

⁵⁹ Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 162.

⁶⁰ Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 163–164.

⁶¹ Dosick, *Living Judasim*, 172–173.

⁶² Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 173.

subsequent generations of Christians. The actions of the Passover—the slaughtering of a lamb, daubing its blood on the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites to save the life of the firstborn of each family from death, the consumption of its flesh shared in a family meal—prefigure “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), whose death is remembered in the Lord’s Supper. The correlation between the slaughtering of the Passover lamb and Jesus’ death on the cross for the salvation of all who believe in him is inescapable. The Apostle Paul, in fact, writes, “. . . Christ, our Passover lamb,⁶³ has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7 ESV; see also NET, NIV, NLT, and others), thus fulfilling the true meaning of the Jewish sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Therefore, the Lord’s Supper is, in a very real sense, the Christians’ Passover.

III. The Lord’s Supper in the Synoptic Gospels: The Actions and Words of Jesus

The Actions: Taking, Blessing, Breaking, and Giving

The Synoptic Gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper agree on the actions and words of Jesus. There are four principal actions in the administration of the bread. They are taking, blessing (thanksgiving), breaking, and giving (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). The principal actions in the administration of the cup are taking, thanksgiving, and giving (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:20, implied in verse 19).

Incidentally, these four actions of taking, blessing (thanksgiving), breaking, and giving are the same actions Jesus performed in the miracle of the multiplication of the bread and fish in the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16) and in the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:6). The early Christians saw in the Lord’s taking, blessing, breaking, and giving the bread to the disciples to distribute to the multitude, a prefiguring of the superabundance of the bread of the Lord’s Supper given to believers throughout time and space.⁶⁴

In his post-resurrection appearance to two apparently disheartened, disillusioned, and confused disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus chided

⁶³ In some English versions of the Bible, the phrase is translated as “Christ, our Passover, has also been sacrificed” (NASB; see also KJV, NKJV, NJB). “Passover” is a literal translation of the Greek word *πασχα* (*pascha*); however, since Paul uses the word in the context of sacrifice, it undoubtedly demands the term, “Passover lamb” [Walter Bauer, s.v. “πασχα,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, ed. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 633; s.v. “πασχα” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Moises Silva, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 3:665].

The RSV and NRSV versions offer a transliteration of “πασχα,” translating the term as “paschal lamb”.

⁶⁴ “Apostolic Constitution of the Roman Catholic Church,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 371–372. See also “The Miracle of the Multiplication” in “Early Symbols of the Eucharist,” Catholic Online, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4347>.

them for not discerning what the prophets had written about the necessity “that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26 ESV). Even though their hearts burned as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, they did not recognize him because “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). When the disciples invited Jesus into their home, he sat at table with them and performed the same four actions: taking bread, giving thanks, breaking it, and giving it to them. “And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31). At that moment of enlightenment, Jesus “vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). The Emmaus disciples returned to Jerusalem to tell the eleven remaining disciples about their encounter with their risen Lord. “They told what had happened on the road, and how [Jesus] was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35).

131

How did the breaking of the bread in the presence of the disciples from Emmaus serve as a catalyst to open their spiritual eyes and awaken their understanding of what Jesus told them as he walked with them on the road? Was it the now familiar actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving the bread? Had they witnessed the miracles of the multiplication of loaves and fishes? Were they in the upper room when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper? Is the phrase “breaking of the bread” synecdochical for the encompassing actions of Jesus at the table (see also Acts 2:42, 46)? Or did the scars in Jesus’ hands identify him as their crucified and risen Lord? Luke does not explain but simply says, “When [Jesus] was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:30–31).⁶⁵

132

The verbs that refer to the two disciples’ inability to recognize Jesus as they walked together on the road to Emmaus, on the one hand, and to recognize him in the breaking of the bread on the other, are passive verbs. “But their eyes *were kept* from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16); “And their eyes *were opened*, and they recognized him. . .” (Luke 24:31; emphasis added). In other words, the “blinding” and “opening” of the disciples’ eyes were enacted upon them, not by their own volition, but from an outside source. There seems to be no doubt that the source was a demonstration of divine activity. In one instance, God kept the disciples from recognizing Christ; in another, he opened their eyes to recognize him. Christ’s breaking of the bread was the sign that precipitated the opening of the spiritual eyes of the disciples.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke*, in *Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible*, ed. R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 286.

⁶⁶ David L. Tiede, *Luke*, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 437.

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The sacred, symbolic actions performed in the sacraments are not merely perfunctory, meaningless actions, as we have seen in Christ's example of breaking bread. A. J. Tomlinson wrote of a particular experience in 1910 in which the presence of Christ was made known in the breaking of the bread while officiating the Lord's Supper:

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As the bread was broken and mention was made of the broken body of Jesus, He seemed to manifest His presence in the midst. As I stood there in the presence of God and before the large audience with the broken bread; a piece in each hand, I seemed to get a broader view of the Christ and wonderful scheme of redemption than ever before.⁶⁷

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Sacred actions embody profound spiritual significance when done conscientiously, informed by the Scriptures, and led by the Holy Spirit. Breaking Communion bread in view of gathered believers is a visual reminder that Christ's body was broken for them (I Corinthians 11:24 KJV, NKJV).

136

The Words of Institution

“Take, eat; this is my body. . . . Drink . . . for this is my blood. . . .”

The words that Jesus spoke when he served the bread and cup to his disciples are germane in orienting us to the theological and spiritual importance of the meal.

137

After Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, he said, “‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Mt. 26:26–28 ESV).⁶⁸ These words are shocking, even offensive to our human sensibilities, and especially offensive to the Jews for whom the Law prohibited the eating of human flesh and blood of any kind. They have been a source of controversy and division within the Christian church for centuries.⁶⁹ How can the bread and the cup, or “fruit of the vine,” served in the Lord's Supper, be the body and blood of Jesus?

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To answer that question, we grapple with the theological concept (doctrine) of *Real Presence*, which is a term that refers to the idea of the actual presence of Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (in some

⁶⁷ A. J. Tomlinson, “Fourth of July at the Tabernacle,” *The Evening Light and the Church of God Evangel*, July 15, 1910, quoted in Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, Pentecostal Theological Seminary, 2010), 169.

⁶⁸ “Take; this is my body” (Mark 14:22); “This is my body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19).

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1360.

form), in contrast to the idea that Christ is only present in memory, figuratively or symbolically.⁷⁰

139

What did Jesus mean when he said, “. . . this [bread] is my body . . . this [fruit of the vine] is my blood”? Did he mean that the bread and “fruit of the vine” were actually transformed into his flesh and blood but retained the appearance (species) of bread and the fruit of the vine? This concept is foundational to the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, a principal doctrine of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church.⁷¹

140

Did Jesus mean that the substance of Christ’s body and the substance of the bread were present together? This concept is foundational to the doctrine of *consubstantiation* that Martin Luther espoused and is the position of the Lutheran Church and some Anglican and Methodist churches.

141

Did Jesus mean that he is spiritually present in the bread and fruit of the vine through the presence of the Holy Spirit? This was John Calvin’s understanding and the position of most Reformed churches.⁷²

142

Did Jesus mean that the bread and fruit of the vine were only *symbols* of the body and blood of Christ, and that the Lord’s Supper was simply a memorial meal? That was Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli’s position.

143

Early Anabaptist theologians Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528), Pilgram Marpeck (1495–1556), and Dirk Phillips (1504–1568) advocated the replacement of any ceremonial use of outward signs as a means of divine grace with the exercise of the faith of the recipients. Therefore, emphasis was shifted away from the presence of Christ in the elements of the sacramental meal to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the gathered community of believers. “. . . [W]hen bread and wine are shared in the power of the Spirit, with those who are gathered in faith and love. . . [they] are united with Christ and one another.”⁷³ So, for the Anabaptists, the Lord’s Supper was a celebration of the presence of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit in the communal life of believers.

144

Zwingli’s position of the Lord’s Supper as a memorial meal has historically, however, been the position of most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.⁷⁴ Pentecostal theologians William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton defend the Zwinglian position that the Lord’s Supper is, first and foremost, a commemorative meal. Secondly, they observe that partaking of the physical

⁷⁰ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., s.v. “Real Presence,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1370.

⁷¹ Apostolic Constitution of the Roman Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 383–386.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1363, 1370–1373, 1381–1382. (See also Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 166.)

⁷³ John, D. Remple, “Sacraments in the Radical Reformation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 298, 302–310.

⁷⁴ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 167. See also N. T. Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, [2015?]), 63.

and tangible symbols of bread and the fruit of the vine are, as “a sacred object lesson,” instructional in affirming Christ’s incarnation. Thirdly, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is inspirational in reminding us that, by faith, we gain access to the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus, although there is no transmission of grace in the consumption of the elements.⁷⁵

145 Some contemporary Pentecostal theologians, however, explain the personal presence of Christ in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper through the immediacy of the Holy Spirit. Chris E. W. Green writes,

146 Plainly put, the church’s Eucharistic-event *is* an experience of Christ’s personal presence, by the power of the Spirit immediately mediated and mediately immediate. The Eucharist is not a *replacement* for the words and works of an absent, far-removed Christ. No, through the sacramental bread and wine ‘the signs transmit the signified’ so that Jesus is thereby and therein transformatively *present*.⁷⁶

147 A. J. Tomlinson held a deep conviction and reverence for the Lord’s Supper. He customarily instructed new church members about the doctrine and observance of the Supper when he organized churches. He regarded the Communion elements with the utmost reverence. In one of his teachings on the Supper, he wrote: “This is an extremely sacred service. It is as if the body of our Lord is lying there in the presence of the humble worshipers.”⁷⁷ Tomlinson’s words reveal a profound conviction of the presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper in some sense. However, in his 1910 experience, as previously stated, Tomlinson officiated the Lord’s Supper, standing before the congregation with the broken bread in his hands, as he encountered the presence of the living Christ.⁷⁸

148 A Pentecostal understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is explained in terms of

149 a dyadic relationship between the Son and the Spirit. That is, in the economy of salvation, the work of the Son and the Spirit are interdependent. The believer encounters one through the activity of the other. According to Hebrews, Christ our High Priest, offered Himself as a spotless sacrifice to God “through the eternal Spirit” (Hebrews 9:14). The bread and the cup of the Eucharist are gifts of Christ through the Spirit. The “real presence” in the Eucharist is more than Pneumatic, it is Christo-Pneumatic. The Eucharist is possible only by virtue of Pentecost. The

⁷⁵ William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2015), 116.

⁷⁶ Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 288.

⁷⁷ Lillie A. Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson: Former General Overseer of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), 93.

⁷⁸ A. J. Tomlinson, “Fourth of July at the Tabernacle,” quoted in Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 169.

Spirit makes Christ really present in the bread and cup. . . . With emphasis on the miraculous, it seems logical that Pentecostals would be willing to affirm the presence of Christ and the Spirit in the bread and cup of the holy meal.⁷⁹

150

The concept of the “real presence” of Christ and the Spirit in the Lord’s Supper has been debated throughout centuries of the history of the Christian church, with different traditions developing their own theological conclusions and liturgies regarding this profoundly sacred sacrament. Although we may adamantly disagree with certain doctrines of other Christian traditions associated with the Lord’s Supper, we should honor and appreciate the arduous biblical and theological investigation of the Church Fathers, theologians, and scholars who labored to understand the meaning of the sacrament. We must understand that every orthodox Christian tradition places Christ at the center of the Eucharist and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the sacrament. It is regretful that the sacred act of worship that Christ intends, and Paul teaches as a means of expressing unity with Christ and his body, has too often divided believers.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, recent Pentecostal scholarship has dared to lean away from the Zwinglian position of the Lord’s Supper as a memorial meal only, toward a celebration of true communion with the real presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

151

IV. The Theology of the Lord’s Supper in the Gospel of John, Chapter 6: Eating Jesus’ Flesh and Drinking His Blood

Interestingly, John only obliquely refers to the Lord’s Supper in chapter 13 of his Gospel and does not record its institution by Jesus. He chooses rather to focus on Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet. Many Christians, however, see Jesus’ discourse in John 6 as the underlying theology of the Lord’s Supper, especially in verses 51–58.

152

The day after Jesus had miraculously fed a multitude of thousands with only five barley loaves and two fish on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the crowd sought him out again on the other side of the sea (Tiberias). (The disciples had crossed over to the western side in a boat. During a storm, Jesus joined them, walking on the water.) The people had misunderstood the meaning of the sign that Jesus performed in multiplying the loaves and fish the previous day. They thought Jesus might be “the Prophet” (like Moses) whose coming had been prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18, and they wanted to take him by force to make him king (John 6:14–15). Citing the provision of manna by which God miraculously fed the children of Israel in the desert through the intercession of Moses, the people

⁷⁹ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 174–175.

⁸⁰ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 168.

ask for another sign to “see and believe” in Jesus (vv. 30–31). They clearly want a repetition of the miracle of the provision of bread.

153

Jesus challenges their misunderstanding and misplaced zeal, telling them that they are not really seeking him for signs but for another free meal. He refuses to perform another sign for them that day (v. 26). Instead, he admonishes them, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” (John 6:27 ESV). When the people ask what they must do to do the works of God, Jesus said,

154

This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. (John 6:29, 32–33)

155

Of course, the people want this bread, but they still do not understand. It is then that Jesus plainly tells the people,

156

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. . . . For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me . . . that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day . . . that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. (John 6:35, 38–40)

157

Here, Jesus’ discourse takes a drastic turn. In the first part of the discourse (vv. 22–50), Jesus engaged the multitude in a conversation about bread (or manna) that sustains physical life, transitioning to a discussion about bread that gives eternal life, then revealing to them that he is the Bread of Life that has descended from God out of heaven, having the power to give eternal life to those who believe in him. It was not lost on the crowd that Jesus was claiming divinity.

158

If these statements were not offensive enough to the multitude gathered that day, what he said afterward was too much for them to bear.

159

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. *For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* (John 6:51, 53–56; emphasis added)

160

The multitude, hearing these words, was confounded, and the people asked among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52). The words seemed cannibalistic to them; the Law prohibited the

consumption of both human flesh and blood of any kind. From that point forward, “many of [Jesus’] disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66). Their desertion was so great that Jesus asked his disciples if they, too, were going to abandon him. It seems surprising that, despite the desertion of many of his disciples because of his words, Jesus did not soften or alter them. What, then, did he mean by saying, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day?” These words express the same idea when Jesus, in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, said, “Take, eat; this is my body. . . . Drink . . . for this is my blood . . .” (Matthew 26:26–28).

161

Christ’s words again spark the debates of what it means for him to be present in the Lord’s Supper, and what it means to eat his flesh and drink his blood. The Church of God of Prophecy does not adhere to the doctrines of transubstantiation and consubstantiation. As people of the Spirit, we may, to an extent, consider the Reformed understanding of Christ being spiritually present in the bread and fruit of the vine. As previously stated, however, the Zwinglian position regarding the elements of the Lord’s Supper as symbols representing the body and blood of Christ while celebrating a memorial meal has been the traditional position of the Church of God of Prophecy. However, when we consider the actions and words of Christ, one might wonder if there is not something more in the sacrament than memory and symbols.

162

While Raymond M. Pruitt, past bishop of the Church of God of Prophecy and author of *Fundamentals of the Faith*, embraced the Zwinglian idea of the Lord’s Supper as a memorial meal, he nevertheless states that “believers do not merely look at the symbols [of bread and fruit of the vine], but receive them and feed upon them. Figuratively, they ‘eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood’ (John 6:53).”⁸¹

163

A. J. Tomlinson wrote that partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine “should be taken with the thought of it being the Lord’s flesh and blood corresponding with other words of our Lord: ‘Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you’ (John 6:53).”⁸² Pruitt’s and Tomlinson’s statements seem to venture beyond an understanding of participation in the Lord’s Supper as mere memory and symbols.

164

A historical review of the interpretation of John 6 informs us that, at the basic level, most readers agree that Jesus’ teaching speaks about a transformational *belief* in Christ. The metaphors of eating and drinking are, in essence, “theological code for spiritually receiving Christ and his benefits by faith in his life-giving death for the sake of the world.”⁸³ Nonetheless, on another level, due to the spiritual nature of John’s Gospel, the context

⁸¹ Raymond M. Pruitt, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1981), 366.

⁸² Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson, 94.

⁸³ Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 236.

surrounding Jesus' teaching, and the church's sacramental experience, it is entirely fitting to interpret Jesus' references to eating and drinking as foreshadowing participation in the Lord's Supper.⁸⁴ This view dates back to the early years of Christianity.

165

Chris E. W. Green proposes that

the convictions and experiences Christian readers bring to the text make it impossible for them *not* to hear at least allusions to the Eucharist. Consequently, we can reasonably propose that readers of the Fourth Gospel are warranted in taking the discourse as instruction both about *both* believing in Christ (i.e. feeding spiritually on him) *and* about the meaning of the church's sacramental practice and experience.⁸⁵

166

When understood in this way, Jesus' discourse in John 6 reveals that the church's participation in the Lord's Supper "is one of the God-given signs of Christ's being 'lifted up.'"⁸⁶ John, in his first epistle, states that the blood of Christ testifies to the truth that he is the Son of God (1 John 5:6–8). Since the Lord's Supper is a sign of this truth, believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God entails faithful participation in the Supper. According to Jesus' teaching in John 6, whoever believes in him also eats and drinks the signs of his flesh and blood, thereby enjoying fellowship (communion) with him and having eternal life (John 6:40, 51, 54–58). But those who refuse to eat and drink have no life (John 6:53). Jesus draws a strong correlation between believing in him and consuming his flesh and blood.⁸⁷

167

We should not think, however, that there is some supernatural transference of eternal life to those who eat the bread and drink "the fruit of the vine" at the Lord's Supper. Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, believing in the salvific benefits of his death on the cross, and partaking of the Lord's Supper in faith are key to the spiritual benefits of the Supper. The spiritual benefits of communion with Christ in the Supper indicate its sacramental character. It is possible to eat and drink faithlessly, even to one's own guilt and judgment (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29), and not receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, it is a betrayal of Christ's presence in a Christian's life to believe in him and yet refuse to partake of the Lord's Supper (John 6:53).⁸⁸

168

We should never allow the ceremonial and sacramental nature (words, actions, etc.) of the Lord's Supper to draw our focus away from the fact that we are identifying, communing, and participating with Christ and his cross. The words, actions, and elements (bread and "fruit of the vine") used in the

⁸⁴ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 236–237.

⁸⁵ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 230.

⁸⁶ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

⁸⁷ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

⁸⁸ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

sacrament of the Lord's Supper are of themselves no benefit if not received in faith. However, when they are received in faith, "they become life-giving because they are instruments of the saving words of Jesus, who himself is the Father's saving Word."⁸⁹ Our eating and drinking in Communion "must draw us into the very life of Christ who invites us to imitate him, making it possible to be conformed to his reality, his 'image'."⁹⁰

169

V. The Apostle Paul's Teaching on the Lord's Supper

A thorough reading of Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church reveals that the Corinthian Christians participated regularly in the Lord's Supper and that they did so in the context of a larger fellowship (agape) meal (1 Corinthians 11:17–22). However, Paul sharply addresses the abuses that were occurring in the shared meals, and especially in the observance of the Lord's Supper. In fact, Paul states that the Corinthians' coming together to celebrate the Lord's Supper resulted in worsening the condition of the church rather than improving it. The reason was that they brought their divisions, factions, and prejudices with them to the Table. Paul tells them that whatever they were doing, it could not be called the Lord's Supper. Some were quick to serve themselves and dined well, and some even got drunk. Others went hungry. Such attitudes and conduct, in what was intended to be a communal meal, humiliated their poor brothers and sisters, deepening the divisions in the church. In doing so, they desecrated the spirit and significance of the Lord's Supper. Paul goes as far as to say that the offenders despised the church of God (v. 22).

170

Paul then reiterates the teaching he had given to the Corinthian Christians on a previous occasion (implied in v. 23) concerning the Lord's Supper. Paul's teaching is "from the Lord," in keeping with the "Apostles' doctrine," and is basically a restatement of Jesus' institution of the Supper "on the night he was betrayed" (v. 23). The actions of taking, giving thanks, and breaking are again mentioned in the sharing of the bread (vv. 23–24). The giving is implied. The cup, the "new covenant in [Jesus'] blood," is also taken and given (v. 25). In both the giving of the bread and the cup, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore, Paul affirms that the Lord's Supper is indeed a memorial meal.

171

Not only is the Lord's Supper a memorial meal, remembering the past event of Jesus' passion and death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28), but it is also an anticipation of the future event of Christ's return to establish God's kingdom in its fullness. Matthew and Mark record Jesus' intimation to his disciples that he would no longer drink the fruit of the vine until he would drink it with them anew in the kingdom of God (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25). Paul underscores both the past and future aspects of the

⁸⁹ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 239.

⁹⁰ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

celebration of the Lord's Supper when he writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death [past event] until he comes [future event]." One of the joyously anticipated events associated with the Second Coming of our Lord, and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom, is the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7, 9), the ultimate union of Christ with the church. In a sense, each celebration of the Lord's Supper is a rehearsal for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

172

We have considered the past and future aspects of celebrating the Lord's Supper, but what about its present aspect? Paul closely associates an individual's worthiness to participate in the Lord's Supper with his/her relationships with his/her brothers and sisters within the worshipping community. While any *unconfessed* sin might render someone unworthy to participate in the Supper, the context of 1 Corinthians 11 suggests that Paul is specifically referring to the sins of divisiveness, prejudice, and partiality as being those that make one particularly unworthy to participate in the Lord's Supper. The church in Corinth was a divided and divisive church. Paul, in fact, reprimands the Corinthians for their divisiveness early in his first letter to them, beginning with chapter 1, verse 10. The remainder of the letter addresses issues that had fostered contention and division among them. The Corinthians were divided over church leadership and spiritual authority; they were divided over spiritual gifts and their manifestations in public worship; and they were divided over economic and social status.

173

Sadly, the Corinthians brought their divisions to the Lord's Table. Paul sternly addresses the issue: "When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" (1 Corinthians 11:17), and "it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (v. 20). The divisiveness among the people within the Corinthian church had desecrated the sacred observance of the Lord's Supper, and it had become something other than sacred, holy communion with Christ and the members of his body. Paul reprimands the Corinthians for despising the church of God and humiliating the poor among them (v. 22). It was their sinful attitudes and behaviors that made some of the Corinthian Christians unworthy to "eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (v. 28). They failed to discern the body of Christ, both in the bread and in the gathered church (v. 29). Consequently, some of those who had partaken of the Supper unworthily had become weak and ill. Some had died (v. 30). Self-examination and preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper includes repenting and asking forgiveness for relational sins and offenses within the body of Christ and seeking reconciliation with one's brother or sister.

174

Some church members do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they feel unworthy. However, if participation in the sacrament required absolute sinless perfection, none of us would be eligible to approach the Lord's Table. As flawed and imperfect human beings, we all struggle with thoughts, attitudes, deeds, and relationships that do not always reflect the image of Christ. For this reason, Paul exhorts us to examine or judge ourselves *and*

then partake of the Supper.⁹¹ Self-examination gives each believer the opportunity to invite the Holy Spirit to test the heart and mind, and if anyone discerns that there is something amiss, to repent of it before partaking of the Lord's Supper.⁹² The importance of participating in the Supper cannot be underestimated.

175

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (John 6:53–56)

176

We should understand that "flesh and blood" is a Hebrew idiom signifying the whole man. This would have provided the cultural and linguistic context for Jesus' words, whether spoken in Aramaic or Greek. Therefore, it can be stated undisputedly that participation in the Lord's Supper is an expression of faith in the whole Christ,⁹³ personally receiving him and his work on our behalf.⁹⁴

177

Paul imparts further insight that eating the bread and drinking the cup unite us in fellowship with Christ and one another.

178

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (I Corinthians 10:16–17)

179

Drinking the Communion "cup of blessing" brings us into fellowship with the blood of Christ who, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). By drinking the cup, we share in the provisions and benefits of the new covenant.⁹⁵ Eating the Communion bread does two things. First, it brings us into fellowship with Christ, who blessed and broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Second, Paul introduces a nuance in the meaning of the bread of Communion. In addition to being the symbol for the physical body of Christ, it is also a symbol for the church, the body of Christ. Paul writes, "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we

⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31–32.

⁹² Psalm 26:2–3; 139:23–24.

⁹³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 282.

⁹⁴ John, *NET Bible, Full Notes Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 2014.

⁹⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 468.

all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:16–17). When believers eat the Communion bread, they affirm that “through Christ’s death they are ‘partners’ in the redeemed community, the new eschatological people of God.”⁹⁶ Paul’s insight regarding the nature of the Lord’s Supper made division at the Lord’s Table particularly detestable.

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VI. A Summary of the Meanings of the Lord’s Supper

- A. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial meal, observed in remembrance of Jesus’s suffering, shedding of blood, and physical death on the cross for our salvation.
- B. The Lord’s Supper is the personal and corporate participation in the body of Christ that was crucified in our stead.
- C. The Lord’s Supper is the personal and corporate participation in the cup of blessing, the new covenant, through the blood of Christ.
- D. The Lord’s Supper is the personal and corporate participation and fellowship in the body of Christ, the church, the one bread and cup symbolizing the unity of the church.
- E. The Lord’s Supper is a celebration in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ.
- F. The Lord’s Supper is a celebration in anticipation of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

181

VII. The Practice of the Lord’s Supper in the Church of God of Prophecy

“Communion and feet washing” were recognized as “holy ordinances” in the first General Assembly of the Church of God in 1906. The Assembly recommended that the ordinances “*may be* engaged in at the same service or at different times at the option of the local Churches” (emphasis added).⁹⁷ It was recommended that every member of the Church should engage in these “sacred services” in order “to preserve the unity of the body, and to obey the sacred Word.”⁹⁸ However, in the 13th General Assembly in 1917, “it was decided that the two [the Lord’s Supper and Feet Washing] are inseparable, and one should follow the other in succession in the same service.”⁹⁹ This position was reaffirmed in the 63rd General Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy in 1968 with the caveat that the two ordinances should be

⁹⁶ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 469.

⁹⁷ Church of God of Prophecy, *General Assembly Minutes: Photographic Reproductions of the First Ten General Assembly Minutes* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1992), 9.

⁹⁸ Church of God of Prophecy, *First Ten Assembly Minutes*, 11.

⁹⁹ *Minutes of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Church of God* (1917), 37.

ministered together “when possible.”¹⁰⁰ In the 100th International Assembly, the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee presented a document entitled “The Sacrament of Footwashing,” which recommended that the sacrament “be observed as often as possible, whether after Communion, or at a separate time.”¹⁰¹

182

Neither Jesus, in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, nor Paul in his discourse on the sacrament, provide specific counsel for the frequency of its observance. Paul writes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Nevertheless, there is biblical and historical evidence that New Testament and early Christians observed the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, if not more often.¹⁰² The following passages suggest that the Lord’s Supper (“breaking bread”) was an integral element in the worship of the New Testament church: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (2:46). “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them. . .” (Acts 20:7). Liturgical churches (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal) regard the Eucharist as the central feature or “summit” of the worship service.

183

In 1906, the first Assembly of the Church of God recommended that “these holy ordinances should be observed one or more times a year.”¹⁰³ M. A. Tomlinson lamented the lack of observance of the Lord’s Supper among many of the churches in his annual address to the 57th General Assembly in 1962. He commented that “[s]ome pastors arrange for it at least once each quarter—four times a year.”¹⁰⁴ This may have been influenced by the Zwinglian practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper “only four times a year.”¹⁰⁵ The Church of God of Prophecy has never established a specific rule of observance other than the recommendation that the Lord’s Supper should be observed at least quarterly.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, quarterly observance of the Lord’s Supper has been the most common practice, although irregular and infrequent observances of the sacrament have perhaps contributed to its neglect and perceived lack of importance among some members of the

¹⁰⁰ *Minutes of the 63rd Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1968), 117.

¹⁰¹ Church of God of Prophecy, *Business Acts* (2018), 21.

¹⁰² Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 156.

¹⁰³ Church of God of Prophecy, *First Ten Assembly Minutes*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Church of God of Prophecy, *Minutes of the 57th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1962), 45.

¹⁰⁵ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 167.

¹⁰⁶ MPM, 2018, 161.

Church. Others have held a somewhat restrictive attitude toward the observance, emphasizing “once a quarter” but ignoring “at least.” There are no biblical or theological principles that would prohibit observing the Lord’s Supper “once a day, once a week, once a month, or once a quarter.”¹⁰⁷ There are those who have expressed concern that frequent observance of the Supper would dull its significance and make it “less special.” Such a thought betrays the fact that one does not understand the profound sacredness, blessing, and joy of communing with our Lord in this most intimate act of worship. We might then ask ourselves if frequent intimate interaction with our spouses and families makes our time together less significant and “special.”

184

VIII. The Administration of the Lord’s Supper in the Church of God of Prophecy

A common practice has been to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and Footwashing in an evening worship service (usually Sunday), making it more feasible and convenient to observe both sacraments together. Due to time restrictions, the observance of the sacraments during the Sunday morning worship services was not practical. Historically, some local churches celebrated the Lord’s Supper after a quarterly business conference since both the conference and the sacraments were to be held quarterly, according to practices established by the International Assembly. However, such practice tended to make the observance of the Lord’s Supper seem perfunctory, and its meaning and sacredness diminished.

185

In recent years, however, Sunday evening services have become less common, and midweek service attendance is too often sparse. Therefore, many churches celebrate the Lord’s Supper on Sunday morning when attendance is normally higher, giving the people an opportunity to participate in this sacred act of worship.

186

The elements traditionally served in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Church of God of Prophecy are grape juice (unfermented “fruit of the vine”; Matthew 26:29),¹⁰⁸ and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:39; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8).¹⁰⁹ The bread often takes the form of homemade unleavened bread, unsalted crackers, or, more recently, Communion wafers. Matzah (Passover crackers) and pita bread are of Middle Eastern origin and contribute to the authenticity of the meal as originally celebrated. Matzah is especially fitting for the Lord’s Supper since Jesus instituted the Supper after the Passover celebration with his disciples, so it is assumed that unleavened bread was used. Messianic Jews point out that the browned toasted ridges in matzah remind the communicant of the stripes and bruises Jesus received on his

¹⁰⁷ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 368.

¹⁰⁸ *Minutes of the Seventh General Assembly of the Church of God* (1912), 19. See also Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson, 94, and Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 367.

¹⁰⁹ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 367.

body. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5 NKJV). The small holes made in the preparation of matzah are reminiscent of the piercings in Jesus’ hands, feet, and side. “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son . . . (Zechariah 12:10).¹¹⁰ Pita is a softer bread that tears easily for distribution.

187

The Lord’s Supper was instituted after the Passover celebration and is, therefore, a separate ritual, although there is a correspondence of meaning between the two observances. (That is why Paul can refer to Christ as “our Passover lamb” in 1 Corinthians 5:7.) Nevertheless, the Lord’s Supper is not the Passover. This impacts our understanding of the elements used in administering the Lord’s Supper. Dr. Harold Hunter writes,

188

It seems that the early church’s use of unleavened bread . . . was something of a historical accident. That is, these elements are not intrinsic to the ceremony but were incorporated because of the historical situation [in the context of the Passover seder].¹¹¹

189

Although unleavened bread (Heb. מצות, *matzoth*; Gr. αζυμα, *azuma*) was required for Passover (Exodus 12:8, 11, 34, 39)¹¹² and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:14–20; 13:3–10), shunning leavened bread in the Lord’s Supper is neither biblically nor theologically required. Leaven (yeast) has both negative and positive connotations in the Old and New Testaments. It is a symbol of malice and evil (1 Corinthians 5:8), and the doctrine of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6–12; Mark 8:14–21; Luke 12:1). Leaven is also a symbol of the kingdom of heaven, which is spreading throughout the world (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21).¹¹³ In the kingdom of God, we will one day feast with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:29).

¹¹⁰ Barry and Steffi Rubin, *The Messianic Passover Haggadah* (Baltimore: The Lederer Foundation, 1989), 13.

¹¹¹ Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” 948.

¹¹² Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 1:410–411.

¹¹³ “Why Do Orthodox Churches Use Leavened Bread for Communion?,” Saint John the Evangelist Orthodox Church, accessed January 6, 2024, <https://www.saintjohnchurch.org/why-orthodox-churches-use-leavened-bread/>

#::~text=The%20Orthodox%20Church%20continues%20to%20use%20leavened%20bread%20in%20Holy,as%20a%20sacrifice%20of%20thanksgiving.

190 Evidence shows that the early church used ordinary bread to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Indeed, the Greek word that Paul uses for bread in his teaching on the Lord's Supper is *αροτος* (common leavened bread), not *αζυμα* (unleavened bread).¹¹⁴ Over time, differences developed between Eastern and Western Christianity in administering the Sacrament. The Eastern Orthodox churches continued to use leavened bread, while the Western churches (Catholic and Protestant) began to use unleavened bread.¹¹⁵

191 A culturally and contextually appropriate substitute would be permissible in cultures where wheat or barley bread is unknown.

192 To serve the elements, many churches use Communion trays with refillable glass or disposable plastic cups for the drink, with a center indentation or separate plate for Communion bread. Hermetically sealed plastic cups containing both the drink and Communion wafer have become very popular for convenience and hygienic reasons. These, however, perfectly symbolize individualized faith expressions and the isolation of the participant rather than his or her fellowship and unity with the gathered body of Christ. The best way to convey the idea of the unity of the church in the observance of the Lord's Supper, visually and symbolically, is by using one bread (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 10:16b–17) and a common cup (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25–26). Sanitation concerns about drinking from a common cup can be mitigated by each participant dipping the tip of their piece of bread into the cup before eating, thus receiving both elements together. This method is called *intinction*. Although receiving the fruit of the vine in this way may not be desirable for some, care should be taken that the sacrament be administered in a way believers may meaningfully partake of the bread and the cup without extraneous concerns.

193 There are several postures in which the congregation may receive the Lord's Supper. Many of us remember sitting at a table at the front of the sanctuary, prepared with a white tablecloth, with twelve chairs, six on each side and a thirteenth on one end, which was left vacant, symbolizing Christ's presence at the table. Participants were served, twelve at a time, while twelve others stood behind them, "tarrying" (literally, waiting) in prayer for them. Paul's intent in 1 Corinthians 11:33 was that the church should wait for each other until all had arrived so that they could eat together. After twelve had eaten and drank of the elements, they would rise, and twelve would take their place. While this is symbolic of the first Lord's Supper, it can take considerable time.

¹¹⁴ Silva, *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 1:411.

¹¹⁵ "TGC Asks: Does Scripture Demand Unleavened Bread in the Lord's Supper?"

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/does-scripture-demand-unleavened-bread-in-the-lords-supper/>. [accessed January 6, 2024].

194

When invited by the minister, the whole church can come forward to partake of the Lord's Supper together, standing or kneeling. Their going forward to receive Communion is a conscious act of responding to the invitation to the Lord's Table. Alternatively, the people can be served in their pews.

195

IX. A Suggested Order of Service for the Observance of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper should be celebrated as a response to the proclamation of the Word of God. This does not mean that the sermon's content must necessarily focus on the sacrament as its theme; whatever the theme of the sermon, it should always be Cristo-centric. Participation in the Supper is the congregation's "yes" to the Word.

196

When it is time to administer the Lord's Supper, the officiating minister may invite the congregation to engage in silent prayer for spiritual self-examination. David's prayer in Psalm 139:23–24 provides an excellent example for this moment of introspection: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." A prayerful hymn or chorus on the theme of surrender to the Holy Spirit, self-examination, or commitment would be appropriate.¹¹⁶

197

It is interesting to note that the Lord's Supper is the only sacrament that involves all five senses. We hear the proclamation of the Word of God, the eucharistic prayer, and the words of institution. We see the bread and the cup. We hold the elements in our hands. We smell and taste them. Christ has given the church a beautiful sacrament that makes his presence fully known to us.

198

The following suggested order of service takes the form of the "four-action shape" of the Lord's Supper discussed in Section III of this document: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.¹¹⁷

199

A. Taking

The action of taking can be expressed in two ways.

1. The officiant, in a spirit of reverence and gratitude, takes the bread and the cup together as the gift of God for the people of God, before offering the Eucharistic prayer and the distribution of the elements. In the bread and cup, believers receive the gift of God through his Son, Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) "In [Jesus

¹¹⁶ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 255.

¹¹⁷ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 48.

Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.” (Ephesians 1:7–8).

- 200
2. “Taking” is the symbolic action of bringing the elements to the Table and presenting them to the officiant for the preparation of their distribution. The officiant may choose deacons, local leaders, ushers, or any members of the church to bring the elements to the Table. This action primarily symbolizes making an offering to God. The supreme offering that was ever made was Jesus’ offering of his life to the Father in completion of his mission, offering his spirit to the Father at his death for the salvation of all those who would believe in him. “[H]ow much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). Among the things remembered in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is Jesus’ sacrifice. The once-and-for-all sacrifice is not repeated at the Table.¹¹⁸

201

“Taking” or making an offering to God may include other expressions of giving. The officiant may invite the congregation to prayer, each offering his/her life as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1–2).¹¹⁹

202

The officiating minister may invite the worshipers to give their tithes and offerings during the time of “taking.” Once they have given themselves totally to God, it should not be difficult to also give of their means. An appropriate congregational offertory hymn or song may be sung during this part of the service.

203

The overall theme of offering should create “the sense that the whole congregation is making an offering of praise and thanksgiving to almighty God. When the people are able to make connection with the symbolic action, their own offering of praise becomes more intense and moving.”¹²⁰

204 **B. Blessing (Thanksgiving)**

205

The “blessing” is the eucharistic (or Communion) prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer contains three parts:

1. Praise

The prayer begins with thanks to God the Father for the goodness and blessings of Creation made available to us.

¹¹⁸ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

¹¹⁹ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

¹²⁰ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

206

2. Commemoration
 - a. Thanks is offered to God for sending his Son Jesus, and through his Incarnation, death, and resurrection, we have received the salvific benefits of his redemptive actions.
 - b. Christ's words of institution may be included at this moment in the prayer.
 - c. A prayer may be offered to express that in partaking of the Lord's Supper, we offer praise to the Father and offer our lives to him.

207

3. Petition
 - a. Invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit upon the people in their participation of the Supper, and that their faith might be confirmed in truth.
 - b. Petitions for prayer may here be included.
 - c. The officiant may conclude the prayer by leading the people in the Lord's Prayer.

208

C. Breaking the bread

In 1 Corinthians 10:17, Paul interprets the bread of Communion as "a sign of Christ, the Bread of Life, in whom the many people of the church are made one body. . . . The broken bread is the symbol of Christ broken for his people, the church, the body united with him in his death and resurrection."¹²¹

209

After the eucharistic prayer, the officiant may silently lift the bread for all to see, then break or tear it as a sign of Christ's body being broken for our salvation. As with Christ's breaking of the bread in the presence of those he served, the officiant's breaking of the bread in view of the congregation makes a visual and symbolic impact. While doing this, the minister may say, "Jesus said, 'This is my body, which is given for you. . .'" (Luke 22:19).

210

The officiant may lift the cup, or tray of Communion cups containing the drink, repeating the words of the Lord, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).

211

The officiant may invite the people to come forward, stand, or sit in the pew to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is fitting to sing a hymn or chorus telling of Christ's sacrifice of love for us while waiting to receive the bread and the cup.

¹²¹ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 261.

212

D. Giving

The officiant (assisted by deacons or other ministers) may quote Jesus' words as recorded by Paul as the bread and the cup are being given to the people in an orderly manner and in an attitude of sacred reverence: Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me. . . . For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:24, 26).

213

Matthew writes that at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn before going to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). A congregational hymn sung at the end of Communion is a beautiful way to end the service. Depending upon the focus or emphasis of the service, the theme of the hymn may be one of thanks for Christ's sacrifice that brought our salvation, a joyous hymn sung in anticipation of our Lord's Second Coming and the marriage supper of the Lamb, or a hymn sung in affirmation and celebration of the unity of the body of Christ.¹²²

214

The Lord's Supper and Healing

Early Church Fathers believed that if partaking of the symbols of Christ's body and blood in Communion provided spiritual nourishment and healing, it could also provide physical healing. Ignatius, in his letter to the Ephesians, referred to "breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die, but to live forever in Jesus Christ."¹²³ "Medicine of immortality" is the translation of a technical medical term in Greek, meaning literally "a healing ointment."¹²⁴ Irenaeus wrote,

215

When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receive the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made, from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him?¹²⁵

¹²² Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 264–265.

¹²³ Ignatius, "The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians," in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 199.

¹²⁴ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

¹²⁵ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 1:528.

216 Cyprian writes of “the true medicine derived from atonement. Augustine
testifies that miracles have been “wrought in the name of Christ . . . by His
sacraments or by prayers. . . .”¹²⁶

217 Sin has corrupted our humanity, and the corruption is demonstrated in a
multitude of physical, psychological, and spiritual diseases. The early church
believed that one could receive healing “medicine” by partaking in the Lord’s
Supper and believing in the healing virtue of the blood of the Great Physician
(Isaiah 53:4–5; 1 Peter 2:24).¹²⁷

218 Early Pentecostals embraced the early church’s understanding of healing
in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Their association of the Supper with
healing was, in actuality, a sacramental concept: Communion as a means of
grace in which Christ is present.¹²⁸ In 1915, James Roswell Flower, a pioneer
leader of the Assemblies of God in Canada,¹²⁹ wrote,

219 The Lord Jesus is brought very near in the observance of the Lord’s
Supper. The redemptive work for the body is often attested to, as the
communicants partake in faith, drinking His blood, and eating His flesh,
the Lord healing them of sickness and delivering them of infirmities. Praise
His precious name forever.¹³⁰

220 Some Pentecostals often referred to the Lord’s Supper as “God’s
medicine.”¹³¹

221 Even among some Pentecostals today, the Lord’s Supper
. . . is often presented as a means of grace that has a two-fold purpose.
The cup represents the blood of Jesus Christ which is shed for the
remission of sins. The broken bread represents the body of the Lord,
which was broken for the healing of the physical body.¹³²

222 Healing services held at the conclusion of the Lord’s Supper were widely
practiced in early Pentecostalism. Increasingly, in both liturgical and non-
liturgical churches, the rite of healing immediately follows the Eucharist, in
which the sick are anointed with oil, and hands are laid upon them in prayer
for healing.¹³³

¹²⁶ Augustine, “The City of God,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 2:485.

¹²⁷ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

¹²⁸ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

¹²⁹ M. T. Boucher, “Flower, Joseph James Roswell and Alice Reynolds,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 642.

¹³⁰ J. Roswell Flower, quoted in Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

¹³¹ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 178.

¹³² Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 178.

¹³³ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 265.

223 **X. Who is authorized to officiate the Lord’s Supper?**

Until 1996, the Church of God of Prophecy authorized only licensed (ordained) male ministers to officiate in the administration of the sacraments (Water Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Footwashing).¹³⁴ Raymond M. Pruitt reflected the church’s attitude and position in 1981 when he wrote, “In keeping with the high and holy nature of the Lord’s Supper, only licensed or ordained male ministers officiate in administering the communion.”¹³⁵ Harold Hunter writes,

224 It is widely known that the Pentecostal Movement has long given prominence to women in terms of such ministries as preaching. However, this has not always been accompanied by the authority necessary to fulfill related tasks. Many Pentecostal churches, by either dogmatic decree or circumscribed practice have eliminated women from those who ordinarily are permitted to administer the sacraments or fulfill the duties of the *episkope*.¹³⁶

225 Ironically, from the beginning, the Pentecostal movement “saw the application of biblical concepts of anointing, empowering, and gifting to include the founding of Pentecostal denominations by women.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, women who were called by God to Christian ministry, and who were appointed to pastorates, served with lay certificates, and therefore were not authorized to administer the sacraments.

226 The Church of God of Prophecy changed their policy toward female Pastors in the 89th General Assembly in 1996:

227 The evidence presented in the foregoing presentation indicates that our female members should be free to exercise their giftedness in speaking, teaching, preaching, or fulfilling pastoral duties.¹³⁸

228 This change in policy authorized female Pastors to fulfill all pastoral duties, including the administration of the sacraments.

229 Deacons and deaconesses, as ordained ministers, are authorized to administer the sacraments in the Church of God of Prophecy.¹³⁹ Lay

¹³⁴ Church of God of Prophecy, *Minutes of the 66th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1971), 144.

¹³⁵ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 368–369.

¹³⁶ Harold D. Hunter, “Reflections of a Pentecostalist on Aspects of BEM,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, nos. 3–4 (Summer–Fall 1992): 342. https://www.academia.edu/2428884/Reflections_of_a_Pentecostalist_on_Aspects_of_BEM?email_work_card=thumbnail.

¹³⁷ Hunter, “Reflections,” 342.

¹³⁸ Church of God of Prophecy, *Minutes of the 89th General Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1996), 39–40.

¹³⁹ Church of God of Prophecy, *Ministry Policy Manual* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 2018), 102.

ministers, however, are not authorized to administer the sacraments,¹⁴⁰ with the exception that he or she has been appointed to a pastorate where no licensed ministers are available. A provisional permit may then be issued, authorizing the lay minister to perform all pastoral duties, including the administration of the sacraments (but excluding officiating weddings). The permit is valid for two years while the lay minister completes the requirements for licensure.¹⁴¹

230

Jesus Christ commissioned the disciples and, by extension, the whole church to preach the gospel throughout the world, make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to teach them all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 24:47). Jesus petitioned the Father to send the Holy Spirit to empower not only the apostles but the entire gathered church to engage in the Commission on the day of Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8, 2:1–11). The Apostle Peter describes the church as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). In Acts and the letters of Paul, we read of numerous followers of Christ who ministered in various ways. Phoebe was a deaconess (Romans 16:1, NLT, NIV). Aquila and Priscilla are never identified as ordained ministers in the church. Yet, they ministered alongside the Apostle Paul. When they found Apollos, who only knew of the baptism of John, they instructed him in “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:24–26). Luke tells us that early Christians celebrated the “breaking of bread” frequently, but he does not tell us who presided in these gatherings (Acts 2:42–46; 20:7).

231

If the whole church has been commissioned to observe all that Christ has commanded, and if the whole church is a “royal priesthood,” then who is authorized to administer the sacraments? Harold Hunter writes,

232

“ . . . [T]he administration of the sacraments should not be the sole prerogative of the ordained ministry. The practice of denominationally licensed ministers administering the sacraments seems biblically allowable but not mandatory.”¹⁴²

233

XI. Recommendations

234

A. We recommend the careful study of this document for personal and corporate edification.

235

B. We reaffirm the International Assembly’s recommendation that each local church observe the Lord’s Supper *at least* every quarter. We also encourage more frequent observance of the Lord’s Supper having both biblical and historical precedent.

¹⁴⁰ Church of God of Prophecy, *Policy Manual* (2018), 81.

¹⁴¹ Church of God of Prophecy, *Policy Manual* (2018), 82–83.

¹⁴² Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostals,” 947.

- 236 C. We affirm that the Lord's Supper is a believer's meal that mainly occurs within the context of the local church. In corporate worship and local church ministry, the primary officiant of this sacrament is the Pastor. We recommend that Pastors train and empower mature believers to administer the Lord's Supper both in the context of corporate and family worship, as well as extended ministries.
- 237 D. We concur that the Lord's Supper is a memorial celebration conveying the real presence of Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit and the participation of the believer in the blessings of the new covenant.
- 238 E. The Lord's Supper is a believer's meal. All who have confessed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, having been forgiven by the shedding of Jesus' blood for the forgiveness of sins, are eligible to receive the elements of Communion (Matthew 26:28). Furthermore, the Church of God of Prophecy practices open Communion, with the biblical admonition that all believers should examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:31–32).

Section Four Race, Relations, and Reconciliation

Introduction

239 The malicious presence of racism, classism, xenophobia, and extreme nationalism, including bigotry and prejudice in this world, remains some of the most destructive moral failures of humankind. Racism—"the systemic oppression of a racial or ethnic group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another"¹⁴³—has existed for centuries, bringing disparities such as subjugation and unfair treatment to many people groups through slavery, Jim Crow segregation,¹⁴⁴ ethnic cleansing, and other unfair practices. Classism, "a belief that a person's social or economic status in society determines their value in that society,"¹⁴⁵ most often results in the systemic oppression of the lower and middle class to the advantage of the upper class such as

¹⁴³ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "Racism," accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>.

¹⁴⁴ "Jim Crow refers to a series of racist laws and measures that discriminated against African-Americans," as defined by *Vocabulary.com Dictionary*, s. v. "Jim Crow," accessed October 31, 2023, [https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/Jim Crow](https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/Jim%20Crow).

¹⁴⁵ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "Classism," accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/classism>.

the caste system of Asia¹⁴⁶ or the many social classes of the Western world. Xenophobia (“the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or anything else that is strange or foreign”¹⁴⁷) and extreme nationalism (“exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations”¹⁴⁸) have no place in the body of Christ. These are not simply sociological issues but sin issues. If you really fulfill the royal law stated in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:8–9).¹⁴⁹

240

We are in a fallen world, and racism is a sin that can be traced back to our fallenness. Biblical racial reconciliation demands that we, the body of Christ, address the sin that causes this divide. We must become intentional about bonding together across racial and ethnic lines to heal any indignities, great or small, with the goal of fostering our shared commitment to Jesus Christ in service to one another. When Jesus established the church, he created it to reflect his kingdom on earth. The church was designed as a place where race distinctions and class divisions are not used as tools to divide because we are all unified in Christ. Accordingly, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).” All humans have been created to have fellowship with God, and the offer of salvation is open to all persons.

241

The pernicious stain of racism brings into question what God’s Word says about his creation and his plan. The Apostle Paul stated in his sermon at Areopagus that God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). The church is to be a model for the world while operating in the world. If the church is to reflect God’s kingdom here on earth, then we must dismantle and renounce the foundations of discrimination, prejudices, and injustice in all forms. James says that it is not possible to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and show partiality to persons. “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism” (James 2:1 NIV). James begins his letter with specific and direct admonitions and instructions, notably the danger of the tongue, as well as the attitudes of the believers. He highlights the differences between the poor and the rich and the treatment shown to them by the body of Christ. James was obviously displeased with the inconsistencies among the brethren, and he condemned the attitudes these believers demonstrated toward others, as well as criticized their failures to act as they should. He first denounced the attitude of favoritism, stating that as believers, we must not show favoritism. It is the fault of one who, when called on to give judgment, has

¹⁴⁶ “A *caste system* is a class structure that is determined by birth. Loosely, it means that in some societies, the opportunities you have access to depend on the family you happened to be born into,” as defined by *Vocabulary.com Dictionary*, s. v. “Caste System,” accessed October 31, 2023, [https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/caste system](https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/caste%20system).

¹⁴⁷ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Xenophobia,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia>.

¹⁴⁸ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Nationalism,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism>.

¹⁴⁹ In this section of the report all biblical citations are provided in the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

deference to the outward circumstances of man and not to their intrinsic merits. He or she prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, highborn, or powerful, to another who does not have these qualities. In short, partiality does not mix with having faith in God. It is the pinnacle of spiritual immaturity to exhibit such inconsistencies in equality, love, and fidelity for all. One must learn to accept others, whatever their status or class, by showing courtesy and compassion with consistency. God shows no favoritism (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25); therefore, neither should Christians. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul had a strong disagreement with Peter over his treatment of Gentiles after being influenced by certain Jewish men. “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision” (Galatians 2:11–12 NKJV).

242

The Bible condemns prejudice and preferential treatment. While prejudices, racial biases, and favoritism are culturally accepted norms, the job of the church is not to adapt to the culture and its norms but to exemplify and live by the values of the Kingdom of God. God is at work in the church, and the church is empowered to influence the culture. We welcome God's creative distinctions as a way to make us stronger, better, and more representative of his kingdom. The church is bigger than individualized groups and preferences, and “we are a people with a purpose made up of many members brought together in one body.”¹⁵⁰

RACE AND ETHNICITY

243

While Scripture recognizes diversity among human groups based on geography, language, ancestry, and spiritual state, it stresses the unity of all people as made in God's image and as descendants of Adam and Eve. The concept of race is a social construct that has often been used to discriminate among persons based on (only the most obvious) physical characteristics—an approach antithetical to biblical teaching.¹⁵¹

244

Race is usually distinguished by the color of one's skin, hair, or facial features. Ethnicity is rooted in social distinctions like dialect, geography, values, customs, and even religious practices. The term *ethnicity* is drawn from the same word the Greek New Testament uses for nations (*ethnos*).¹⁵² This term is used to classify humanity based not on physical traits but on shared cultures, religions, land, laws, and languages. Both “race and ethnicity” have been employed to differentiate and exploit certain populations,

¹⁵⁰ Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 257.

¹⁵¹ Brannon Ellis, Jessica Parks, and Mark Ward, eds., *Lexham Survey of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Publishers, 2018), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁵² Walter Bauer, s. v. “ἔθνος,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 277.

communities of people, or cultures. However, we were all created in the image and likeness of God:

245 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)

246 In his book, *A Biblical Theology of Race*, J. Daniel Hays asserts, “Image refers to natural qualities such as reason and personality. Image refers to the mental and spiritual faculties that people share with their creator, as well as a physical resemblance. It refers to a capacity to relate to God.”¹⁵³ As image bearers, we are to live in harmony with each other and reflect the character of a God who “shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). Theologian Millard Erickson states, “The first human, Adam, is not racially identifiable. The Hebrew term ‘*adam*’ simply means ‘humankind’ and makes no reference to race. Hence, Adam did not belong to an identifiable ethnic or national group, but rather represented the origin of all people.”¹⁵⁴

247 It is clear from Scripture that God did not view any of the nations as inherently superior or inferior to the others. Even in Abraham’s call in Genesis 12, God promised to bless “all the families of the earth” through Abraham and his seed (Genesis 12:3). In the New Testament, Jesus emphasized that the temple should be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). Paul reminds the Colossian believers that after having put on the new man, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, . . . put on tender mercies, kindness, humility. . . . But above all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:11–12, 14). Unfortunately, racism also exists in the church, but any form of racism is a sin against God and those who are made in his image. Jarvis Williams, author of *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity*, contends that the “belief that there are actually different races of people within the human race to be viewed as superior or inferior is false, antithetical to biblical anthropology, and contrary to what the Bible says about the image of God in all humans and about the people of God.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol 14 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 48–49.

¹⁵⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 458–459.

¹⁵⁵ Jarvis Williams, *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 153.

A DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY OF RACE RELATIONS

248 In Bishop A. J. Tomlinson’s 1935 Annual Address to the General Assembly, he wrote the following:

249 I have a matter of much concern upon my heart that I would like to mention just as lovingly and tenderly as I can. It is an undisputed fact that we have the “every creature” message. This includes all of the great races of the world. . . . We all know that there is to be no difference as far as their souls are concerned. The middle wall of partition has been broken down by the blood of the cross, says Paul, and all have access to God through Jesus Christ alike. All are to be members of His body, the Church, and thus under the same government represented by the same flag.¹⁵⁶

250 From the inception of the Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson, the first General Overseer, had an affinity for diversity in leadership and the constituency. Amidst extreme racial prejudice, Jim Crow laws, and against cultural norms, on May 31, 1909, Bishop Tomlinson granted evangelist licenses to two Bahamians (African Caribbeans), Edmond and Rebeca Barr, who served as missionaries to both Florida and the Bahamas.¹⁵⁷ Amidst persecution from the Bahamian government, other organizations, including the established church, the zeal of these missionaries and the work of God continued. According to Michael S. Swann in his book titled, *The Holy Jumpers, A Concise History of The Church of God of Prophecy in the Bahamas 1909 – 1974*,

251 The Barrs, likewise, endured much persecution, hardships, and privation as did many of the new Bahamian converts. But because of their vision for the lost, they pressed and continued to make full proof of their ministry by holding prayer meetings in homes, and campaigns on the streets and in a large rented hall.¹⁵⁸

252 Historian of Pentecostal Studies Harold D. Hunter observed that

253 By 1913, three Hispanic congregations were operating in New Mexico. In 1915, Edmond Barr became the overseer of The Black Work in Florida for two years. In 1919, Bishop Tomlinson appointed C.F. Bright as Overseer of Pennsylvania and, in 1920, New Jersey. Under Tomlinson’s leadership, in the 1919 and 1920 Assembly, blacks were now able to preach at the General Assembly. By 1921, an African American named T.J. Richardson, two more African Caribbeans, and one Hispanic were appointed to the Council of Seventy and various assembly committees.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ A. J. Tomlinson, “The Colored Race,” part of “Annual Address of General Overseer,” in *Minutes of the 30th Annual Assembly of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God, 1935), 36.

¹⁵⁷ Harold D. Hunter, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 284–286.

¹⁵⁸ Michael S. Swann, *The Holy Jumpers, A Concise History of The Church of God of Prophecy in the Bahamas 1909 – 1974* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2018), 8.

¹⁵⁹ Hunter, *Azusa Street Revival*, 284–286.

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Hunter also contends,

In some states, the Church of God of Prophecy may have been the first church to defy Jim Crow laws in their worship services. African Caribbeans, African Americans, and Latin Americans have been charged with the leadership of states, some of which include European-Americans as the majority. This unprecedented approach distinguishes the Church of God of Prophecy, not only among classical Pentecostals but many denominations in the United States.¹⁶⁰

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RECONCILIATION

Recent events such as the George Floyd murder, economic disparities among racial groups, and other racial disharmonies have served as a catalyst for addressing the need for reconciliation amongst the nations. We acknowledge the ethnic cleansing occurring across European and Asian nations as well as the blatant genocide in the continent of Africa. The Church of God of Prophecy is aware of the wars, military actions, civil unrest, and political infightings in European nations. We are aware of the discriminatory colorism practiced in Hispanic countries. The Church of God of Prophecy acknowledges the unfair and unjust treatment of women in the Middle East, Asia, America, and across the world. The Church of God of Prophecy is keenly aware of the venomous and increasing anti-Semitic and anti-Palestinian sentiment that is exploding globally not only because of recent wars, but a deep-seated resentment dating back to biblical times. The Church of God of Prophecy acknowledges the injustices and racial biases and the present flaring up of racial and ethnic tensions that are reflective of ongoing realities of economic and social disparities across this globe. Historically, the New Testament church has actively participated in addressing social issues in the church. Luke addresses the concern of the Greek-speaking Jews who felt as if their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, giving the advantage to the Hebraic Jewish widows. In response, men were appointed to handle this matter, and the entire body was pleased because of the actions of the church elders (Acts 6:1–5). As a church, we directly and openly challenge these global trends and actively engage in pointing our membership back to the Cross, duly executing our mandate to the ministry of reconciliation. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he states that

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All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18–20)

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The responsibility of the church, according to Paul is

to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to

¹⁶⁰ Hunter, *Azusa Street Revival*, 284–286.

the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:9–11)

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We, the global body of the Church of God of Prophecy, join those who mourn and are suffering at the ugly hands of injustice. We stand against hatred, bigotry, and racial prejudices of any form. We commit ourselves anew to teaching, preaching, and ministering a gospel of hope that promotes justice and freedom from fear. We encourage our leaders and our laity to aspire to model a life of racial reconciliation in our global church body. We do so because we are called and empowered by the Lord Jesus, the great Healer, who has by his death, burial, and resurrection, achieved a reconciliation that is to be proclaimed in word and deed to all people. “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Ephesians 2:14 KJV). Any reticence on the church’s part to seek justice and reconciliation undermines the credibility of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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We must communicate that we see great intrinsic value in building deep and abiding relationships with one another. The New Testament explicitly show us that Jesus Christ has reconciled racially and culturally divided groups into one new humanity, “so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (Ephesians 2:15 NKJV). He has united them into one body, thus making peace so that the church can function in unity. While the church is the place where race and class distinctions are no longer to be used as tools of division and disunion, this does not mean that diversity and differences do not exist both culturally and socially. However, as a church, we can no longer allow these differences to separate us and overshadow the fact that God’s kingdom values all people. We have unique strengths and attributes that, when joined together in oneness, make us more complete, balanced, and whole in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:16).

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Diversity and distinction are not to be denied but celebrated. God has people from every background, group, and demographic represented in his kingdom. We must engage and celebrate each other’s differences socially and respectfully if we are ever to be one in Christ, but we must also refuse to allow the distinctions of culture to interfere with the truth of God’s Word. The New Testament demands active unity in the church, a unity that explicitly joins differing ethnic groups together because of our common identity in Christ. The gospel that we preach demands that we carry compassion and the message of Jesus Christ across ethnic lines; “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). When Paul and Barnabas are sent to the Gentiles in Acts 13, the leadership of the church is diverse as well: “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord. . .” (Acts 13:1–2).

We, as the church, cannot formulate our theology through the lens of culture but through the lens of Scripture. It is only when we know the truth of God's word, and that truth becomes the absolute standard by which our beliefs, behavior, and commitments are aligned, that we will experience freedom in Christ. Reconciliation will never be achieved by one group or a particular culture imposing its ideas, preferences, and contexts over another. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council met to settle the dispute over the circumcision of Gentile believers demanding that they strictly adhere to the Law of Moses. Peter assured them that "the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. . . . God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7–9). Biblical racial reconciliation can only happen through an environment created with one purpose in mind: the advancement of the kingdom of God. It is an environment where people are loved and accepted, and there is a merging of diversities and strengths through which the glory and the power of God can manifest themselves, and the people of God can mutually serve and celebrate one another. "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46–47). This is the model set by the early church.

CONCLUSION

Racism is pervasive and destructive, and its ongoing presence in our society is incongruent to the teaching of Scripture. Discrimination is not a skin problem but a sin problem. Racism is a condition of the heart, and before we can be biblically reconciled, we must acknowledge and address the sin that is causing the divide in our churches. Until we come face to face with this volatile situation and speak out in righteous indignation against injustice, nothing will change. We must repent of this stain and bond together in unity across racial and cultural lines as a church if we ever want to receive the commanded blessings upon our church as decreed in Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore. (Psalm 133:1–3)

Discrimination is wrong, and it must be condemned, judged, and changed, not applauded or excused by any means, regardless of the circumstance. Prejudice and partiality have no place in the body of Christ or in this world, and we as a church must stand firmly against them. "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). Indifference has smothered and snuffed out impulses for reconciliation. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face" (Psalm 89:14). Our continued silence could make us appear complicit with injustice and inequity. Therefore, we must actively and aggressively advocate for our

brothers and sisters who have been adversely affected by the sin of racism. “The goal of the church should be to glorify God by reflecting the values of God among the people of God through letting the truth of God be the standard by which we measure right and wrong and the way we accept skin color, class and culture.”¹⁶¹ God enjoys variety and diversity, and all of God’s children have value.

265 There must first be **confession and repentance**. These two elements are paramount to this discussion and will allow the body to move forward. Clarity is equally vital so there may be understanding, and understanding leads to **unity**. We must shed light on this murky problem so that it may bring revelation, and revelation leads to **reconciliation**. There must be a cutting away of contaminated flesh in order to bring healing to the body, and healing leads to **restoration**. In order for this to come to fruition, we must exercise **love and forgiveness**.

266 We must never forget that we are and always will be a church that is filled with grace, love, and forgiveness. “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV). We concur with Dr. Tony Evans in his book *Oneness Embraced*:

267 The church is to be viewed as a community, that is, a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common who are inseparably linked together by a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals; more specifically, a group of interdependent organisms of different species growing or living together in a specified habitat.¹⁶²

268 The 101st International Assembly affirmed the following statement:

We mourn with those who are mourning and are suffering at the ugly hands of injustice. We stand against hatred, bigotry, and racial prejudices of any form and confess that it has devalued our brothers and sisters, both in minority and majority contexts, across the world. We must commit ourselves anew to teaching, preaching, and ministering a gospel of hope that promotes justice and freedom from fear. “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph 2:14 NKJV).

269 Through the church, God has created a reflection of His kingdom here on earth, and we convey that we see great intrinsic value in building deep and abiding relationship with one another. His Word explicitly shows us that He has reconciled racially and culturally divided groups into “one new man” (Eph 2:15). He has united us into one body, thus making peace, so that the church can function in unity. The church is the place where race and class distinctions are no longer to be used as tools of division and disunion. We celebrate the diversity and differences of God’s creation through race, ethnic groups, culture, and

¹⁶¹ Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 27.

¹⁶² Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 156.

language. As the church, however, we can no longer allow these differences to separate us.”¹⁶³

RECOMMENDATION

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We recommend that this document be included in the *Ministry Policy Manual of The Church of God of Prophecy*.

¹⁶³ Church of God of Prophecy, *Business Acts of the 101st International Assembly* (Church of God of Prophecy, 2022), 6.