

IMPORTANT BUSINESS ACTS



Adopted by the 102nd International Assembly of the
CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY
Orlando, FL | July 28 - August 4, 2024

International Presbytery Meeting

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024

The International Presbytery meeting for the 102nd International Assembly convened at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, July 28, 2024. Presiding Bishop Tim Coalter greeted the group. He invited the members of the presbytery to take their seats and asked for someone to come to the platform who spoke Portuguese, French, Korean, an African language, Arabic, Russian, and German. He asked that each person say “hello” in their language and then asked the remaining members of the presbytery to repeat the greeting. Bishop Coalter invited those who had come to the platform to return to their seats and asked everyone to greet three people in a language that was not their own.

Presiding Bishop Coalter stated, “Prayer is a core value of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP). If you are able, please kneel before the Lord. Nothing rises above what we are doing now—praying. Commit every aspect of this Assembly to the Lord. Let’s lift our voices together. God hears every language.” The presbytery knelt and prayed.

9:22 a.m. All presbytery members read Ephesians 3:20–21 out loud in their own language: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (NIV). Everyone sang “Hallelujah.”

The presiding bishop acknowledged the general presbyters were in the room. He asked each to stand one at a time and mention the names of bishops in their area who passed away since 2022 so that a moment of silence could be observed. Bishop Clayton Endecott of Wider Europe and the Middle East shared that all the leaders from his area are with us. Bishop Dr. Ben Feliz spoke of two losses: Bishop Santos Cerrato and Bishop Rey Martinez. Bishop James Kolawole mentioned Bishop Jombile of South Africa East. Bishop Dr. Clayton Martin said, “God has preserved all our

leaders.” Bishop Dr. Tim McCaleb remembered Bishop Asalemo Kuka. Bishop Dr. Brian Sutton remembered Bishop Frank Smith. Bishop Dr. Gabriel Vidal said his bishops are “all alive.” Bishop Coalter asked that everyone stand and bow their heads in a sacred moment of silence.

Bishop Coalter asked if everyone was ready for some good news. He spoke on the benefits of hearing and sharing good news with Bishop Feliz translating.

When we receive good news, good hormones decrease blood pressure, improve heart health, and a general feeling of well-being helps your immune system. Good news can improve your sleep, reduce anxiety, and promote feeling better. Are you ready for some good news? Good news will improve your mood—calmer, more relaxed, more resilience, hope, and optimism. Good news improves cognitive function. Memory and decision making are enhanced. Are you ready? Most importantly spiritual benefits strengthen our faith and deepen our trust in God. Good news promotes inspiration and vigor. Bad news seems to be all we hear. The phone rings. You think, “What now?” Isn’t it good that we will receive good news in this room? It is our job to be the thermostat, not the thermometer. Plenty of bad news even among church people; sarcasm and negative talk is abundant. Change the temperature. You are the carriers. Good news is to be shared.

The general presbyter of Africa, Bishop Kolawole, came to the platform and invited the leadership of Africa and the Africa Finance Committee (AFC) to come to the stage. Bishop Kolawole shared marvelous statistics from Africa: they have increased from 1,479 churches to 1,800 churches; from 199,402 members to 247,429 members; from 791 ministers to 956 ministers; and from 29,679 saved to 51,747 saved.

10:14 a.m. The presiding bishop asked all African brothers to stand. There was applause for them.

Bishop Coalter emphasized the importance of leadership development, expressing a personal affinity for it. He mentioned a tendency to gravitate towards leadership literature, referencing

Romans 12:6–8 (NIV), which highlights various gifts such as prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, and giving. He pointed out that those who are called to lead should do so with diligence, noting that other translations emphasize zeal, passion, and seriousness. He articulated that leadership is a divine gift, and how one utilizes it is their offering to God. He posed a reflective question about how individuals are evolving as leaders.

According to the *Harvard Business Review*, organizations have recognized the necessity for leadership skills to adapt in order to thrive, acknowledging that the skills that facilitated initial success may not suffice for sustained success. Bishop Coalter asserted that stagnant skills would hinder progress, emphasizing the need for continuous growth and development in leadership roles without settling into complacency. He proposed dedicating one session of every IP meeting to leadership development, including insights from external experts.

He distributed a “Leadership Topic Options” form with categories such as cognition, leadership, mental wellness, personal growth, physical wellness, and professional social/interpersonal skills, asking participants to prioritize three topics. He instructed attendees to note their region at the top of the form, as staff could tailor training to regional needs.

Regarding the ordination process, Bishop Coalter shared that the general presbyters (GPs) had discussed the topic and sought input from the IP. He noted that a significant proportion of ordinations were occurring within North America, proposing that ordinations could also be conducted within countries when attendance at the Assembly was unfeasible. He described state and regional ordinations as more personal and meaningful, advocating for a planned and organized approach to local ordinations, potentially during conferences or gatherings.

He then opened the floor for comments on this proposed change, encouraging attendees to voice their opinions. Bishop Edward Payne from the Bahamas supported in-country ordinations, emphasizing the value of local connections during such ceremonies. Bishop Koissi Antoine expressed in French the

importance of ordaining bishops in their own countries, citing visa challenges. Bishop Coalter noted that witnessing ordination is crucial to validation.

Bishop David Orozco from Bolivia agreed with the sentiment of recognizing bishops in their respective countries and suggested informing all bishops at the IA of this initiative. Bishop Coalter acknowledged the idea of ratifying bishops within their countries.

Bishop Scott Gillum inquired whether the presence of the general presbyter would be mandatory during ordinations, to which Bishop Coalter committed to consulting with GPs. He then called for a show of hands to gauge support for this change, which received an overwhelming consensus. Details on conducting ordinations will be provided, he assured.

Bishop Coalter discussed a restructuring of communications at the International Offices (IO), referencing Acts 2, which describes the sound that accompanied the apostles speaking in diverse languages. He emphasized the need for effective communication strategies that resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, explaining that the division of Global Communications would bring together various aspects of communication for a more cohesive approach. He showcased a flow chart to illustrate this structure, urging nations to prioritize excellence in communication.

Bishop Dr. Shaun McKinley was introduced as the new executive director of Global Communications. He shared his background, including his education and experience in ministry. He conveyed a vision of storytelling within the church, commemorating the legacy of Fred S. Fisher, Sr., a gifted storyteller. He highlighted the present thriving of the church and the significant contributions of individuals in various regions.

Bishop Coalter prompted attendees to recognize their own stories and contributions within the church, affirming the importance of sharing these narratives.

Joy Hensley, who recently completed her master's degree and serves as the English language training specialist for Children's

Ministries, expressed her eagerness to engage with others and her commitment to developing leaders who can impact children.

Bishop Coalter emphasized the significance of reaching children with the message of Christ, sharing statistics about how many come to faith before the age of 12. He then provided an update on upcoming transitions within the organization, including the transitions of Bishop Kirk Rising and Dr. Cathy Payne in 2026, encouraging attendees to maximize their engagement with these leaders during their remaining time in their roles.

He highlighted the ongoing discussions about leadership transitions among GPs, recognizing the growth and maturity of the regions under their leadership. As he concluded this segment, he signaled a break for lunch, inviting attendees to return at 2:30 p.m.

At 2:30 p.m., Bishop Coalter welcomed everyone back, expressing gratitude for their punctuality. He encouraged participants to share their good news with the Lord and led a moment of worship.

Bishop McCaleb called upon the Asian bishops to stand and be recognized, celebrating their contributions to the church. He highlighted various success stories from regions such as Samoa, Fiji, the Philippines, Nepal, India, Korea, Pakistan, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, and Indonesia, noting the resilience and growth of churches despite challenges.

Bishop Coalter reiterated the importance of support from the Assembly and acknowledged the commitment of those in the Caribbean region to church planting. He encouraged attendees to consider how they could contribute to the collective mission of the church.

As the session continued, significant updates were shared on the implementation of the MDP program across various regions, showcasing the training of leaders and the establishment of new churches.

Bishop Dr. Elias Rodriguez presented a visual update on the MDP program, detailing its expansion into numerous countries and the training of thousands of leaders.

Bishop Dr. Michael Hernandez communicated the progress of

various academic programs aimed at equipping ministers globally, emphasizing accessibility and affordability in theological education.

Bishop Coalter called for attention to the ongoing stewardship initiatives, discussing the importance of responsible kingdom resource management and the need for joyful accountability.

The session concluded with celebratory remarks on the growth of the church, including the introduction of new national bishops and ministries making significant strides in their communities.

International Presbytery Meeting

MONDAY, JULY 29, 2024

Bishop Coalter convened the IP meeting at 9:07 a.m. and encouraged everyone to share good news in every conversation.

Bishop Feliz led the hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” and everyone participated in singing.

Bishop Coalter: “Picture God extending his hand to fulfill your needs. Take a moment to ask him what you need right now.” The room engaged in prayer.

Bishop Vidal spoke of the danger of being isolated. He said the church should serve as a fellowship space and that certain aspects need transformation. He introduced Bishop David Ceballo, who spoke of the work in Argentina.

Bishop Vidal returned to the microphone to celebrate the salvation of individuals, the growth of the church, and the establishment of new congregations in South America. He extended his gratitude to the national bishops.

Bishop Sutton, North America general presbyter, came to share that their goal is to multiply by 2030, aiming to plant 500 new churches by that time.

Seven North America bishops shared good news from their regions.

Bishop Sutton returned to address the audience and said a booklet detailing the Multiply 2030 initiative is available.

Bishop Shaun McKinley announced a break.

Sister Cathy Payne said she had tickets available for the Mission Breakfast.

At 10:29, the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee (BDP) came to the stage.

Bishop Dr. Phil Pruitt: “We have good news to share. We serve you and this church. The committee has two new members, Sister Doreen Makaya and Sister Sophia Pringle.”

Bishop Elias Rodriguez read part of a statement: “We believe in the principle of ‘iron sharpening iron’ and reject any accusations of being ‘woke.’ We are indeed brothers and sisters in the Lord.”

Bishop Dr. Tim Harper clarified that the previous statement is not part of the report but a response to remarks made regarding the inclusion of the name George Floyd in the 2022 BDP report. He said the majority of comments made after the 2022 Assembly focused on race relations. Some constituents requested a more detailed statement and a comprehensive study. He further said that the name George Floyd appears only once in the report.

Bishop Coalter called for the report to be read.

Bishop Pruitt referred to the preamble, stating that it is self-explanatory, and moved on to Section One and asked for questions.

Bishop Coalter reminded the IP that everyone had been asked to read the report.

Bishop Dr. Carswell Leonard inquired about the duration of the suspension of evaluations.

Bishop Harper responded that the suspension would not prohibit evaluations. Section One mentions a six-year timeframe, but a regional bishop can still conduct evaluations. There was more non-compliance than compliance, prompting the need for a suspension to avoid legal complications.

Comments were made for and against the suspension.

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There was discussion concerning Section Two: Leadership Succession (p. 19).

Bishop Coalter called for a show of hands to indicate support for the evaluation process outlined in Section One. Several abstained. He then asked for a show of hands in favor of the entire Section Two document as written. Those in opposition raised their hands.

Bishop Pruitt presented five recommendations affirming that every church should observe the Lord's Supper quarterly.

Bishop Coalter called for questions but received none. He moved to the next topic: Race Relations. The only recommendation was that it be included in the *Ministry Policy Manual*.

Bishop Coalter was inclined to accept the sacrament issue, prompting a show of hands. He also called for a vote on the final section on Race Relations, noting that many abstained.

Bishop Harper clarified that the statements read are not part of the document. Bishop Coalter concluded that the committee is not required to amend the statement based on sentiments from the IP. The BDP will reconvene to discuss the Governance Manual.

The session was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

At 2:00 p.m., Bishop Coalter encouraged the IP to fill the room with positive stories. Everyone engaged in conversation.

Bishop Coalter called the Finance & Stewardship Committee to the platform at 2:04, expressing gratitude for their willingness to engage with the IP. He encouraged applause as they approached.

Bishop Scott Gillum, Chair, pointed out that there were six sections of the report, but only one requires Assembly action (Section 4). Sections 5 and 6 contain commendations, while Sections 1, 2, and 3 are for informational purposes only.

There was discussion on Section 1.

Sister Paulette Wilbanks read a narrative of Section 2, highlighting that a budget is essential. The last International Assembly recommended it but did not approve it. The 79th Assembly had already recommended it, and the 94th Assembly reaffirmed that previous decision. The Finance & Stewardship Committee reiterated that each national, regional, or supervisory office should submit a budget, referencing prior Assemblies.

There was discussion on Section 2, and Sister Wilbanks read more from the report.

Bishop Nathaniel Beneby pointed out that differing governmental requirements might contradict Assembly rulings, given our presence in 135 nations. The leadership in those countries must find a balance.

Bishop Peter Koyea from Guinea Conakry asked if this applies to the global Church. He noted that some areas in Africa lack budgeting knowledge and inquired how to approach this issue.

Bishop Gillum explained that leadership at the national or general presbytery level will face challenges in meeting every need. Therefore, local leadership must ensure that principles are applied contextually. It would be unrealistic to assume that the same approach fits all globally.

Section 3 is an informational report regarding the Assembly Expense Offering. Bishop Nathaniel Beneby summarized the section, stating that to assist churches in collecting the Assembly Expense Offering, the collection date has been changed from the third Sunday of January to May annually.

Bishop Gillum stated the current church planting investment policy does not require new churches to submit funds. The committee recommended maintaining this policy for a 12-month period for new churches. After 12 months, new churches must comply with all requirements set forth by the Present Financial System.

Bishop Coalter mentioned that the 10 percent would not go to the

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national, regional, or supervisory office and suggested that Bishop Daniel Felipe revisit this issue.

Bishop Felipe explained that implementing a rebate system poses challenges and may not be feasible.

Bishop Gillum confirmed that the original draft included this idea, but Bishop Felipe's feedback led to its modification.

Bishop Endecott invited the bishops from Europe to come to the stage. He expressed gratitude for their 17,000 members and 18 languages spoken across Church services. Several new churches have been established, including one in the Slovak Republic. Bishops shared updates.

3:40 p.m.—Celebration Break

At 4:15 p.m., Bishop Coalter welcomed everyone back and thanked Bishop McKinley for organizing the celebration setup.

At 4:18 p.m., Bishop Pruitt, from the Biblical Doctrine & Polity Committee, presented a governance document for the International Presbytery.

Bishop Coalter reminded the IP that this document was utilized during the last selection of the presiding bishop. He invited questions or suggestions for streamlining the process.

There was discussion concerning the Committee's operational framework, emphasizing the absence of the Holy Spirit in the current selection process.

Bishop Elias Rodriguez stressed the importance of discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance, noting that the Committee's work is a collaboration with him [the Spirit].

Bishop Pruitt proceeded to detail the general presbyters' responsibilities on pages 16 through 19.

Bishop Coalter invited any questions.

There was one comment but no questions.

Bishop Coalter shared his commitment to the mission of reconciling the world to Christ, urging both committees to simplify their processes to avoid distractions.

Sister Payne interjected, recalling the chaotic nature of 2014 and expressing determination to improve the process.

Bishop Coalter acknowledged that female voices are welcomed and valued in these discussions.

Bishop Coalter summarized that the committee recognizes the need to focus on relevant questions and concerns. The BDP Committee made themselves available for those who couldn't voice their inquiries. He announced plans for official photos with spouses and a forthcoming luncheon in the Butler Ballroom.

International Presbytery Meeting

TUESDAY, JULY 30, 2024

Bishop Coalter welcomed the IP to the Tuesday morning session and quoted C.S. Lewis: “You are never too old to set another goal or to dream another dream.” He invited everyone to pray together.

Bishop Coalter asked Bishop Clayton Endecott, general presbyter of Wider Europe and the Middle East, to come to the platform. Bishop Endecott introduced Christian Fricke, national bishop of Germany and Hungary, who shared encouraging words about the strength of COGOP leadership. He expressed gratitude for the confidence our leaders instill in us, emphasizing the importance of collective growth and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit across the globe.

Bishop Coalter returned to the platform to remark, “We have received nourishing words today. Thanks be to God!” He also informed the IP that due to inflation, the cost to maintain the Assembly rose from \$1 million to \$1.3 million. Bishop Nat Beneby came to the platform and spoke regarding COGOP financial strategies for financing the Assembly. Giving for the Assembly achieved debt freedom for the 2018 and 2020 Assemblies, and the aspiration is to continue that trend into 2024. The goal is to not only have the 2024 Assembly paid in full but also ensure that there are additional funds to be redirected to support church planting efforts globally.

Bishop Coalter gave instruction concerning seating during the upcoming ordination service. He provided details for Tuesday evening’s Parade of Nations rehearsal and encouraged participation. He also admonished the IP that integrity remains paramount in administrative responsibilities and that reported numbers must accurately reflect the ministries’ reach.

Bishop Scott Gillum presented amendments to the F&S report regarding funds from new churches, emphasizing the need for collaboration.

Bishop Shaun McKinley made an announcement giving instruction concerning portraits of international presbyters and companions to take place at the Butler Ballroom entrance. The International Presbytery Luncheon would be at noon in the Butler Ballroom. Afterward, the IP group photo would be taken in the Gatlin Ballroom.

Bishop Coalter dismissed the IP meeting with these words: “Let us continue our day with purpose and unity, reminding ourselves that we are the thermostat of change within our communities.”

Corporate Board Report to the
102nd International Assembly
JULY 31, 2024

The Board of Directors would like to give honor and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all blessings flow. We would also like to express our gratitude for the faithful generosity of our members and contributors worldwide. The faithful giving of individuals and local churches has allowed the Church of God of Prophecy to continually impact the world with the redeeming message of the gospel. When participating in the Church’s financial system, the efforts of the local church are multiplied, reaching beyond borderlines and accomplishing more than one can do alone. Your tithes and generous giving have funded ministry initiatives worldwide, providing the necessary resources for evangelism, church planting, leadership development, disaster relief, orphanage support, and much more.

This Board recognizes its paramount responsibility to serve as faithful stewards of the resources God has entrusted this church with. As such, we submit to our duty of accountability—first to God, second to this Assembly, and third to all men.

ECFA Accreditation

The Board of Directors remains committed to maintaining the highest financial integrity and accountability levels. In the same spirit of Paul’s writings in 2 Corinthians 8:20–21 (AMP, paraphrased), we are “taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of *other* people.” This commitment is reflected in our ongoing association with the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). The ECFA provides accreditation to leading Christian nonprofit organizations that faithfully demonstrate compliance with established standards for financial accountability, transparency, fundraising, and board governance. The standards set by the ECFA are often far above the minimums required by law, as it seeks to promote not just financial

compliance with industry standards, but more importantly, to promote excellence in accountability and trustworthiness. This accreditation is reevaluated every year. We are pleased to announce that we have been successfully evaluated and have met ECFA standards for Christian nonprofit organizations for 2023, standards that we have consistently met every year since 2012.

Audit Process

The board's commitment to maintaining the highest levels of financial integrity and accountability is also reflected in the appointment of an audit committee, entrusted with the responsibility to monitor the audit process and report its findings. The Audit Committee is comprised of members of the Corporate Board and the Finance & Stewardship Committee. The members serving on this committee are Llewellyn Graham (chairperson), Joshua Lynn, Nathaniel Beneby, Paulette Wilbanks, and Rupert Neblett. In addition to engaging the Audit Committee, since 2019 the board has partnered with one of the premier auditing firms in the United States—Batts Morrison Wales & Lee—who have shared their independent opinion of their completed audit for the year 2023.

White Wing Messenger

In 2023, the *White Wing Messenger* celebrated its 100th anniversary as the official publication of the Church of God of Prophecy. For a century our magazine has served as a crucial connection for our global ministries, as we have shared inspirational articles from our leaders and ministers, as well as reported ministry happenings of our all-nations church.

The 100th anniversary also marked a year of transition for our publication as we transitioned from our traditional printed format to a digital magazine platform. This transition was the result of a need for good financial stewardship and a need to efficiently reach a much broader audience.

The soaring printing and postage costs that magazine publishers have experienced in recent years, as well as the demand for digital magazines, increased the challenges of continuing with the traditional printing model. The same has been true for the *White*

Wing Messenger. To ensure that decisions were made with accurate information, the International Offices' Communications Department secured an independent, church-affiliated auditor to review the magazine's finances. The analysis from the auditor revealed that the magazine was operating at a negative revenue gap in excess of \$160,000.00 annually with just over 3,800 subscribers globally. In order to make our pricing structure sustainable, our subscription rates would have had to increase by 42%* for the English magazine, from \$20 to \$48 annually, with our foreign language versions increasing by 440%, from \$10 to \$54 annually.

***Editor's Note:** This report is offered verbatim. The figure for the English magazine rate increase should be 140%.

Considering how cost-prohibitive this adjustment would have been for our subscribers, the current trends in publishing, as well as the worldwide constituency of the Church, it was the unanimous belief of this board that fully transitioning to a digital platform helps us accomplish the *Messenger's* purpose of connecting our family globally.

In May of 2024, the last printed edition of the magazine was issued, ushering the *White Wing Messenger* into a new era of digital publishing. By focusing our efforts on the digital platform, we are now able to provide inspiration and resources in new ways, in multiple languages, with enhanced features embedded in the magazine, such as videos, downloads, and more. Readers now are not only able to view the magazine online, but they can also download it, print it, and share it with others at no cost.

This Board affirms its commitment to the *White Wing Messenger* and its important place as a voice of the Church. We are excited by this new day in the life of the magazine and the potential for growth of its influence and impact in our ministries.

Sale of the Former Tomlinson College Property

In the 99th International Assembly of 2016, the Finance & Stewardship Committee requested and received approval from this Assembly for the Board of Directors to pursue selling the former Tomlinson College Property (99th *International Assembly Journal*, 2016, Section III, pp.

103–105). The approval of this International Assembly included the following three key stipulations:

1. First, the Board will pursue a sale of the property that would not fall below the appraised value.
2. Second, upon completion of the sale, the Church would secure the principal amount of the full sale's proceeds and transfer it into a designated trust that would be managed according to the present investment policy for the best and safest return.
3. Third, the interest earned from this designated trust would be used to fund leadership development initiatives.

On March 20, 2024, the Church of God of Prophecy finalized the sale of the former Tomlinson College campus property to Cate Brothers Development, a real estate development company from Cleveland, Tennessee. The agreed-upon purchase price for the property was \$4,400,000.00. This amount was above its appraised market value of \$3,864,000. After deducting closing costs and taxes associated with the sale, the Church received proceeds in the amount of \$4,387,373.43.

New Trust Fund for Leadership Development Initiatives

Upon completion of the sale, the funds were allocated to a newly designated trust account. The investment policy governing this account was written by the Finance and Stewardship Committee in consultation with our investment managers to meet the Assembly's decision on how these funds are to be managed.

The policy governing the management of the designated trust establishes that each year, the Trust Fund will distribute only the interest and dividends earned during the prior 12 months to fund leadership development initiatives. The Trust Fund policy further establishes that distributions may only occur if such an amount will not reduce the Trust Fund's market value below its historic dollar cost, which represents the sum of its contributions.

The objectives and strategies of the leadership development initiatives that will be funded from this new Trust Fund are being developed and they will be shared by this Board once finalized.

Closing Remarks

Finally, the members of the Board of Directors would like to recognize its chairman, Presiding Bishop Tim Coalter, for his commitment to seeing God's work of reconciliation through the ministry of the Church of God of Prophecy. Bishop Coalter's consistent pursuit of divine inspiration, excellence, and accountability has challenged us to be more excellent stewards of God's resources. It is an honor and a privilege to serve the fellowship of this church under his visionary leadership.

Respectfully submitted,

1. Tim Coalter, Chair
2. Jeffery Davis
3. Clayton Endecott
4. Daniel Felipe
5. Benjamin Feliz
6. Llewellyn Graham
7. James Kolawole
8. Joshua Lynn
9. Clayton Martin
10. Timothy McCaleb
11. Maria Ruano
12. Gary Smith
13. Brian Sutton
14. Gabriel Vidal

*The Biblical Doctrine and Polity (BDP) Committee Report
to the 102nd International Assembly*

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

Preamble

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).

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.

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

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:
 - 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

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

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

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

Section One

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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 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.

To continue with a broken and defective evaluation process that

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

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

NOTE: Section Two did not pass.

Statement from Secretary, Dr. Tim Harper:

We, the members of the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, wish to commend our Presiding Bishop on his excellence in moderating the business of the 102nd International Assembly. Accordingly, we commend the constituents of this Assembly who have dialogued with us, to this point, during the business session, for your decorum and spiritual maturity. We also express our respect to this Assembly in your decision regarding Leadership Succession as it relates to the office of Presiding Bishop and General Presbyters. We accept your decision. The BDP exists to serve the Assembly.

Given the decision of this Assembly and in the spirit of properly stewarding our remaining time allotted for business in the 102nd Assembly, we voluntarily choose to suspend the balance of section two of the Leadership Succession document. We do have a significant conviction that this Church needs to address a better exit strategy for leaders who have given their lives to the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the expansion of this Church. Consequently, the BDP suspends for the 102nd Assembly the recommendations on Leadership Succession as it relates to the Standing Assembly Committees and Exit Strategy. We will seek to dialog among the members of the Committee, with the Presiding Bishop and General Presbyters, and invite dialog from

the constituents of this Church as we continue to study leadership succession for Assembly Committees and a better exit strategy.

Section Three

Studies and Recommendations on the Sacraments (Ordinances)

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

Introduction

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. . . .”⁵ 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.”

About Ordinances and Sacraments

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.⁶ One definition of “ordinance” is “a prescribed usage, practice, or ceremony.”⁷ A synonym for ordinance is “command.”⁸ Indeed, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Footwashing

⁵ 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.

⁶ Harold D. Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 947.

⁷ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Ordinance,” accessed October 5, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ordinance>.

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Ordinance,” accessed October 5, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=ordinance>.

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.

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.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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).”¹¹ 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.”¹²

Augustine later nuanced the meaning of sacrament “as a ‘visible word’ or an ‘outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.’”¹³ 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 by the gathered people of God.”¹⁴ In

⁹ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Sacrament,” accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrament>.

¹⁰ R. S. Wallace, “Sacrament,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 965.

¹¹ Wallace, “Sacrament,” 965.

¹² Wallace, “Sacrament,” 965.

¹³ Wallace, “Sacrament,” 965.

¹⁴ Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” 947.

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 done¹⁵], through the administration of the sacrament.”¹⁶

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:

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. . . .¹⁷

In other words, speaking in tongues is an outward (and audible)

¹⁵ “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/>.

¹⁶ Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” 947.

¹⁷ 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>.

sign of an inward operational grace of the Holy Spirit and can, therefore, be understood sacramentally.

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 ceremonial or memorialistic, although their rich symbolism was not lost on the practitioners.”¹⁸

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:

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

¹⁸ Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 177–178.

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).¹⁹

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).

The Passover is a seven-day²⁰ springtime festival celebrating the liberation of the children of Israel after four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, as recorded in Exodus 12–14.²¹ The Passover Seder (meal) is observed on the first evening of the Passover festival. Each celebration has three focuses: past, present, and future.

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.

The Present

In celebrating the Passover, each participant places himself/

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 162.

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.²²

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 1948.²³

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.”²⁴ This is a concept in both Judaism and Christianity (see Revelation 21:9–27).

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).

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 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

22 Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 163–164.

23 Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 172–173.

24 Dosick, *Living Judaism*, 173.

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,²⁵ 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

²⁵ 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 *πάσχα* (*pascha*); however, since Paul uses the word in the context of sacrifice, it undoubtedly demands the term, “Passover lamb” [Walter Bauer, s.v. “πάσχα,” *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. “πάσχα” 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 “πάσχα,” translating the term as “paschal lamb.”

superabundance of the bread of the Lord's Supper given to believers throughout time and space.²⁶

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

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

²⁶ “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>.

it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (Luke 24:30–31).²⁷

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.²⁸

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:

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.²⁹

Sacred actions embody profound spiritual significance when done conscientiously, informed by the Scriptures, and led

²⁷ David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke*, in *Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible*, ed. R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 286.

²⁸ David L. Tiede, *Luke*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 437.

²⁹ 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.

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).

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.

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).³⁰ 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.³¹ 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?

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 form), in contrast to the idea that Christ is only present in memory, figuratively or symbolically.³²

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

³⁰ “Take; this is my body” (Mark 14:22); “This is my body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19).

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1360.

³² 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.

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.³³

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.

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.³⁴

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.

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.”³⁵ 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.

Zwingli's position of the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal has historically, however, been the position of most Evangelical

³³ Apostolic Constitution of the Roman Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 383–386.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1363, 1370–1373, 1381–1382. (See also Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 166.)

³⁵ 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.

and Pentecostal churches.³⁶ 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 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.³⁷

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,

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*.³⁸

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 worshippers."³⁹ Tomlinson's words reveal a profound

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2015), 116.

³⁸ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 288.

³⁹ Lillie A. Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson: Former General Overseer of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), 93.

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.⁴⁰

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

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 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.⁴¹

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

⁴⁰ A. J. Tomlinson, "Fourth of July at the Tabernacle," quoted in Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 169.

⁴¹ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 174–175.

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.⁴² 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.

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.

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 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.

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

⁴² Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 168.

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 says,

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)

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

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)

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.

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

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)

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).

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.

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).”⁴³

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).”⁴⁴ Pruitt’s and Tomlinson’s statements seem to venture beyond an understanding of participation in the Lord’s Supper as mere memory and symbols.

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.”⁴⁵ Nonetheless, on another level, due to the spiritual nature of John’s Gospel, the context 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.⁴⁶ This view dates back to the early years of Christianity.

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

⁴³ Raymond M. Pruitt, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1981), 366.

⁴⁴ Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson*, 94.

⁴⁵ Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 236.

⁴⁶ Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 236–237.

the meaning of the church's sacramental practice and experience.⁴⁷

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.'"⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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).⁵⁰

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,

⁴⁷ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 230.

⁴⁸ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

⁴⁹ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

⁵⁰ Green, *Lord's Supper*, 237.

and elements (bread and “fruit of the vine”) used in the 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.”⁵¹ 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’.”⁵²

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).

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

⁵¹ Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 239.

⁵² Green, *Lord’s Supper*, 237.

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.

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 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.

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 worshiping 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.

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.

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.⁵³ 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

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31–32.

it before partaking of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁴ The importance of participating in the Supper cannot be underestimated.

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)

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,⁵⁵ personally receiving him and his work on our behalf.⁵⁶

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

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)

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.⁵⁷ Eating the Communion bread does two things. First, it brings us into fellowship with Christ, who blessed and broke the

⁵⁴ Psalm 26:2–3; 139:23–24.

⁵⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 282.

⁵⁶ John, *NET Bible, Full Notes Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 2014.

⁵⁷ 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.

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 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.”⁵⁸ Paul’s insight regarding the nature of the Lord’s Supper made division at the Lord’s Table particularly detestable.

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.

⁵⁸ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 469.

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).⁵⁹ 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.”⁶⁰ 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.”⁶¹ 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 ministered together “when possible.”⁶² 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.”⁶³

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.⁶⁴ The following passages suggest that the

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Church of God of Prophecy, *First Ten Assembly Minutes*, 11.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Church of God (1917)*, 37.

⁶² *Minutes of the 63rd Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1968), 117.

⁶³ Church of God of Prophecy, *Business Acts* (2018), 21.

⁶⁴ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 156.

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.

In 1906, the first Assembly of the Church of God recommended that "these holy ordinances should be observed one or more times a year."⁶⁵ 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."⁶⁶ This may have been influenced by the Zwinglian practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper "only four times a year."⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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 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

⁶⁵ Church of God of Prophecy, *First Ten Assembly Minutes*, 11.

⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁷ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 167.

⁶⁸ *Ministry Policy Manual*, 2018, 161.

a month, or once a quarter.”⁶⁹ 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.”

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.

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.

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),⁷⁰ and

⁶⁹ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 368.

⁷⁰ *Minutes of the Seventh General Assembly of the Church of God* (1912), 19. See also Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson, 94, and Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 367.

unleavened bread (Exodus 12:39; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8).⁷¹ 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 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)."⁷² Pita is a softer bread that tears easily for distribution.

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,

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].⁷³

⁷¹ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 367.

⁷² Barry and Steffi Rubin, *The Messianic Passover Haggadah* (Baltimore: The Lederer Foundation, 1989), 13.

⁷³ Hunter, "Ordinances, Pentecostal," 948.

Although unleavened bread (Heb. מצות, *matzoth*; Gr. αζυμα, *azuma*) was required for Passover (Exodus 12:8, 11, 34, 39)⁷⁴ 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).⁷⁵ In the kingdom of God, we will one day feast with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:29).

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 αρτος (common leavened bread), not αζυμα (unleavened bread).⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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

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

⁷⁴ Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 1:410–411.

⁷⁵ “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.>

⁷⁶ Silva, *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 1:411.

⁷⁷ “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].

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.⁷⁸

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.

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.⁷⁹

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

⁷⁸ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 255.

⁷⁹ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 48.

not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). “In [Jesus 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).

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.⁸⁰

“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).⁸¹

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.

The overall theme of offering should create “the sense that the whole congregation is making an offering of praise and

⁸⁰ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

⁸¹ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

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.”⁸²

B. Blessing (Thanksgiving)

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.

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.

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.

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

⁸² Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 256.

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.”⁸³

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).

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).

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.

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).

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

⁸³ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 261.

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.⁸⁴

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."⁸⁵ "Medicine of immortality" is the translation of a technical medical term in Greek, meaning literally "a healing ointment."⁸⁶ Irenaeus wrote,

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?⁸⁷

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. . . ."⁸⁸

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

⁸⁴ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 264–265.

⁸⁵ 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.

⁸⁶ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

⁸⁷ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 1:528.

⁸⁸ Augustine, "The City of God," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 2:485.

and believing in the healing virtue of the blood of the Great Physician (Isaiah 53:4–5; 1 Peter 2:24).⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰ In 1915, James Roswell Flower, a pioneer leader of the Assemblies of God in Canada,⁹¹ wrote,

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.⁹²

Some Pentecostals often referred to the Lord’s Supper as “God’s medicine.”⁹³

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.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

⁹⁰ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

⁹¹ 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.

⁹² J. Roswell Flower, quoted in Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 177.

⁹³ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 178.

⁹⁴ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 178.

⁹⁵ Webber, *Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 265.

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).⁹⁶ 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."⁹⁷ Harold Hunter writes,

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*.⁹⁸

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."⁹⁹ 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.

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

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. . . .

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ Pruitt, *Fundamentals*, 368–369.

⁹⁸ 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.

⁹⁹ Hunter, "Reflections," 342.

We recommend that women be acknowledged in the preaching ministry of the church to provide leadership in the oversight ministry of the church.¹⁰⁰

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

Deacons and deaconesses, as ordained ministers, are authorized to administer the sacraments in the Church of God of Prophecy.¹⁰¹ Lay ministers, however, are not authorized to administer the sacraments,¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³

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

¹⁰⁰ 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.

¹⁰¹ Church of God of Prophecy, *Ministry Policy Manual* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 2018), 102.

¹⁰² Church of God of Prophecy, *Policy Manual* (2018), 81.

¹⁰³ Church of God of Prophecy, *Policy Manual* (2018), 82–83.

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).

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,

“. . . [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.”¹⁰⁴

XI. Recommendations

- A. We recommend the careful study of this document for personal and corporate edification.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- E. The Lord’s Supper is a believer’s meal. All who have confessed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, having been

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostals,” 947.

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

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”¹⁰⁵—has existed for centuries, bringing disparities such as subjugation and unfair treatment to many people groups through slavery, Jim Crow segregation,¹⁰⁶ 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,”¹⁰⁷ most often results in the systemic oppression of the lower and middle class to the advantage of the upper class such as the caste system of Asia¹⁰⁸ 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”¹⁰⁹) and extreme nationalism (“exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on the

¹⁰⁵ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Racism,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>.

¹⁰⁶ “*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).

¹⁰⁷ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Classism,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/classism>.

¹⁰⁸ “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).

¹⁰⁹ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Xenophobia,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia>.

promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations”¹¹⁰) 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).¹¹¹

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.

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

¹¹⁰ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “Nationalism,” accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism>.

¹¹¹ In this section of the report, all biblical citations are provided in the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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 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).

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.”¹¹²

Race and Ethnicity

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

¹¹² Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 257.

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.¹¹³

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*).¹¹⁴ 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, communities of people, or cultures. However, we were all created in the image and likeness of God:

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)

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.”¹¹⁵ 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

¹¹³ Naomi Noguchi Reese, “Race,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, edited by Mark Ward, Jessica Parks, Brannon Ellis, and Todd Hains (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Publishers, 2018), Logos Bible Software.

¹¹⁴ Walter Bauer, s. v. “εθνος,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 277.

¹¹⁵ 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.

ethnic or national group, but rather represented the origin of all people.”¹¹⁶

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.”¹¹⁷

A Denominational History of Race Relations

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

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,

¹¹⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 458–459.

¹¹⁷ Jarvis Williams, *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 153.

the Church, and thus under the same government represented by the same flag.¹¹⁸

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.¹¹⁹ 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*,

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.¹²⁰

Historian of Pentecostal Studies Harold D. Hunter observed that

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.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ 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.

¹¹⁹ Harold D. Hunter, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 284–286.

¹²⁰ 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.

¹²¹ Hunter, *Azusa Street Revival*, 284–286.

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.¹²²

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

¹²² Hunter, *Azusa Street Revival*, 284–286.

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

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)

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 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)

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.

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).

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.”¹²³ God enjoys variety and diversity, and all of God’s children have value.

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**.

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*:

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,

¹²³ Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 27.

a group of interdependent organisms of different species growing or living together in a specified habitat.¹²⁴

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).

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 language. As the church, however, we can no longer allow these differences to separate us.”¹²⁵

Recommendation

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

¹²⁴ Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 156.

¹²⁵ Church of God of Prophecy, *Business Acts of the 101st International Assembly* (Church of God of Prophecy, 2022), 6.

Finance and Stewardship Committee Report
to the 102nd International Assembly
CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

Introduction: Stewardship—Heart Matters

Every believer begins the journey of biblical stewardship when we give our hearts to Christ and desire to live according to his Word. According to Richard Niebuhr, “Stewardship is everything we do after we accept Christ. It is all about life.”¹

“Our relationship with the Lord is always begun and maintained by the heart. Of course, to contact the Lord is a matter of the spirit, but this must be initiated and maintained by the heart, for our heart is the gateway of our whole being.”²

It is in our hearts that transformation and real change begin, and it is the ongoing, daily transformation of our hearts that will lead us to a life of stewardship as God designs.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us, “**Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it**” (NIV).

Stewardship is, therefore, all about our lives as believers in the kingdom of God that is founded on the core principle that all that we are and all we have are God’s.

God designs every believer to be a channel through whom all kinds of resources flow into the kingdom to enable his work on the earth. The availability of resources that we have in our local churches is, therefore, dependent on how we use and apply the resources that we have received. Whether or not we make these resources available and how much of it we make available will reflect where our heart is in Christ.

¹ Richard Niebuhr, quoted in R. Scott Rodin, *Stewards of the Kingdom: A Theology of Life in All Its Fullness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 73.

² Witness Lee, *The Economy of God* (Los Angeles, CA: The Stream Publishers, 1968), 75.

Is our heart's perspective one where we consider that what we have is never enough for ourselves; therefore, the provision we receive from God is used only for our own daily needs or is stored up for future needs, and none flows to others or the kingdom? When this is the perspective of our hearts, we effectively become clogged pipes with our financial resources, and we have no impact in the kingdom of God. One's view is that we will never have enough to satisfy our own needs plus to flow to others.

Or is it that our heart's perspective is that there is enough provision to meet our needs, and we may allow a small amount to flow to others? The more we receive, the more we consume it for ourselves, and very little flows to others. Our perspective is that the supply of resources is limited, so we must use all we can for ourselves. Regardless of how much we receive, it is never enough. Our impact on the kingdom of God is therefore limited as our priority is meeting our own needs, whether they be at a personal, local, state, regional, or national church level.

Wouldn't we rather be at a place where our heart's perspective is to use the financial resources that we have received not just for ourselves, but always seeking to identify outlets or channels to allow those resources to flow to others? A believer whose heart is set towards God in this manner knows and understands that God is the source of all provisions and is secure in the knowledge that he will meet all our needs simply because he is the sovereign Lord who loves us. We know that our God has an infinite supply of resources and that there is always enough to meet our needs. One's heart is, therefore, always to give first, as we know that we can never use all the resources that God entrusts to us for ourselves.

As we give, God honors his Word, **“Give and it shall be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over...” (Luke 6:38)**. This is a heart that will always experience the overflow, as the more we give resources through the channels we identify or develop, the more resources we will receive.

What we value above all is the satisfaction of knowing that the needs of others are being met and that the kingdom of God is

being impacted for his glory. Jesus reminds us in **Matthew 6:21**, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

It is time to check our hearts toward stewardship. What is our heart towards that which we have received as individual believers and at the local, state, or national church level? Is it being used only to satisfy our needs? Is it being stored up just for our own future needs? Or have we developed or identified channels through which these resources can flow to bless others in the kingdom? The increases in our ministries and churches will come only when we do the latter—only when we give first. It is only then that the many needs in our churches, states, and nations can truly be met. It is only then that even greater amounts will flow to us to manage.

It requires us to first give ourselves to the Lord as the Macedonian church did, who, out of their deep poverty, gave beyond their ability.

Oh, for hearts that are truly transformed—hearts that truly know that our God is the source of all we need, that his supply is limitless, and that we are the only channels God has through which he makes provision available in his kingdom. Then giving of our time in service in our local churches and communities will be motivated by hearts set on God and his kingdom. Giving our time and resources to missions in our local areas and around the world will be motivated by hearts that are set on seeing the gospel being proclaimed and the world being reconciled to Christ. Giving our tithes and offerings at all levels in the church (individuals and local churches) will be motivated by hearts set on honoring God with our substance (which is his) and seeing the growth of his kingdom on earth.

As believers and as a church collectively, we are being called back to remember who we are in Christ and to check our hearts toward being stewards of that which the Lord has given to us. Our stewardship of who we are and what we have received is a matter of where our heart is set. **“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7 NKJV).**

The rich blessings of the Lord will come to those who are faithful in this regard. **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward**

you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Section 1: Revision of the Decline Compensation Form (Information Only)

The Decline Compensation Form was amended to address some questions submitted to the Committee and to adapt to changing circumstances. These amendments are made to improve this document’s effectiveness, enhance its clarity, and rectify any inconsistencies or shortcomings. Ultimately, the purpose of amending this document is to ensure its relevance, accuracy, and applicability in the present context, and to promote fairness, compliance, and optimal outcomes for all parties involved. As a committee, we noted that this document may have been ambiguous in that it could have been perceived as an allowance to be changed every month. This would be exhausting for bookkeeping on a local church level and could lead to misappropriations. Furthermore, it could have become cumbersome to adhere to on a local level while complying with the national/regional/state office.

NOTE: The following was passed in the 2022 International Assembly, and the revised form can be found as an appendix to this report.

Administrative Action for Section 1

When a pastor has an occupational position or other means of financial support and desires not to receive remuneration from the tithe paid into the local church, the church should operate as follows:

- 1) *A document should be drafted (an example is provided in this report) and submitted to the church conference for recording in the minutes that the pastor has declined the full tithe, or a portion of the tithes given by the local church. It should clearly state that for the present pastor only, the tithes now belong to the local church for distribution in other areas of ministry.*

- 2) *The local church treasurer shall send the 10 percent portion of tithes the pastor would have paid had the pastor received those tithes to the national/regional/state office. This would ensure the national/regional/state office receives the funds necessary to assist their respective work in equipping churches in their jurisdiction.*

Section 2: Budgets (Information Only)

Today, the church does business in a culture that demands greater accountability. As leaders, we must not ignore whole-life stewardship that builds trust. The diminishing trust of people toward organizations is a clear indicator that accountability is critical.

To assist our churches and national/regional/state offices to be more transparent and have more accountability, a budget is a must. A budget creates openness to a growing vision, defines priorities in planning ministry needs, builds constituents' confidence and trust, and leads to a recognition that the ministries of the church are worthy of their support. It also builds confidence in the leaders and their management of the church's resources. The benefit for the church or national/regional/state office is that a budget gives you an administrative tool to evaluate your current work, look for solutions, envision your needs for ministry, and assist in accomplishing the mission of God in your ministry location.

At the 2022 International Assembly, one of the sections presented by the Finance & Stewardship Committee was on budgets. We stated that local churches and national/ regional/state offices should prepare a budget for each fiscal year. Since then, with consultation and research, we realized that previous Assemblies had already discussed and approved budgets for each level of our church.

In 1984 at the 79th General Assembly, an Assembly decision was made regarding all levels of the Church—general, state, and local—to operate within a balanced budget.

The Assembly action states the following:

The study by the Ways and Means Committee in the past two years has revealed that certain economic indicators concerning our cash and expenditure flow need attention. There is growing evidence that more and more of our churches are having financial difficulties, which are, in part, due to over-extending themselves. No people can live beyond their means. Faith in God does not necessitate over-extension that leads to deficit spending, which threatens the very thing it is trying to build.

We therefore recommend that general, state, and local churches operate within a balanced budget, said policy to become effective as of October 1986.³

In the minutes of the 94th International Assembly in 2006, the Finance & Stewardship Committee stated:

We the Finance and Stewardship Committee, recognize the need to reaffirm in this General Assembly the balanced budget decision made in the 79th General Assembly in 1984.⁴

In the “Fiscal Responsibility” section of our current *Present Financial System Journal*, it states:

In order to maintain accountability before the local church communities, the local church, the churches in the nation/region/state, and the International Offices, each level of the Church should prepare a yearly budget with full accountability of how the Church finances perform against the budget presented to the local conference, national/regional/state convention, or International Assembly, as is applicable.⁵

Our report also stated that each church/nation/region/state should send financial statements to their area of supervision. The *Journal* continues,

Additionally, the national/regional/state offices will submit to their respective general presbyter’s office a copy of their

³ “Balanced Budget Concept,” Section 4, *1984 Assembly Minutes of the 79th Church of God of Prophecy World-Wide Annual Assembly*, 133.

⁴ “Balanced Budgets,” Section 2, *2006 Assembly Minutes of the 94th Church of God of Prophecy International General Assembly*, 182.

⁵ “Fiscal Responsibility,” Section 5, *The Journal of the 100th International Assembly*, 108.

annual financial statement that is reported to their national/regional/state convention within 30 days following the said convention.

This financial statement is to reflect at a minimum, the following information:

- 1) National/regional/state offices budget for the previous and current convention years (with columns showing items budgeted, actual and variances);
- 2) An income and expense statement; and
- 3) A balance sheet report showing the total assets and liabilities.⁶

With this information, the current Finance & Stewardship Committee would like to reemphasize this important ruling of the 79th Assembly and encourage all local churches and national/regional/state offices to prepare an annual budget as a management tool and financial accountability report. At the end of their fiscal year, a Statement of Financial Position (balance sheet), a Statement of Activities (income and expense), and a budget report showing actual versus budget should be submitted to the national/regional/state office and encouraged by all local churches.

Section 3: Assembly Expense Offering (Information Only)

The International Assembly continues to be a blessing to our church and the world globally. With our members' and supporters' faithful giving, we have been able to walk away from recent Assemblies with expenses paid in full. What is so very exciting and encouraging is that every area of our church world is participating in and experiencing the blessings that come because of giving.

One area the Finance & Stewardship Committee wishes to encourage is each local church receiving an Assembly Expense Offering annually. In the 2016 International Assembly, the following

⁶ "Fiscal Responsibility," Section 5, *The Journal of the 100th International Assembly*, 108.

was presented by the Finance & Stewardship Committee and approved by the International Assembly:

We therefore recommend that consideration is given to implementing an Assembly Expense Offering, to be received by every local church globally on the third Sunday of January, or an annual budgeted amount. Each local church should feel the flexibility to receive this offering on a date before May 1 should it work better in their overall budget process. The May 1 date will give adequate time for it to be sent to the National/Regional/State Office and then to the International Office before the end of the fiscal year.⁷

Implementation of this Assembly ruling has proven that the date set for the offering is not practical in every local church. So, the Corporate Board (previously Administrative Committee) met and, in accordance with their delegated authority as outlined in the 96th International Assembly, they amended the date for each local church to receive an Assembly Expense Offering or budgeted amount anytime during the period January to May annually. Additionally, funds can be submitted to the International Offices (United States), or International Account (all other nations) in June of each year.

The Finance & Stewardship Committee wishes to express sincere thanks to every local church that has participated in this fundraising effort. We encourage all local churches to support this effort, as these offerings play a key role in subsidizing the Assembly expenses. Furthermore, this opportunity for heartfelt giving enables all our members worldwide to participate in and bless our International Assemblies.

Section 4: Church Planting Investment Rationale

This committee recognizes the paramount importance of our evangelistic mandate to preach the word of reconciliation to the world. Biblical history teaches us, and current statistics corroborate,

⁷ "Consideration to Offset International Assembly Expense," Section 1, *Ministry Policy Manual*, 152.

that planting new churches is the most effective method to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, church planters today face many challenges from the moment they accept the calling to plant to the moment they can celebrate the birth of the new church. One of these challenges is the financial burden that often keeps new churches planted from investing more resources to reach their communities. These financial constraints can often be exacerbated when a church plant transitions to become an organized local church.

Under our present financial system, a mission (a congregation that has not yet been organized as a church) retains all funds and does not participate in the financial reporting system of the Church of God of Prophecy. They, however, are required to submit reports periodically to national/regional/state offices for accountability and for the records.

Assembly Action

In consultation with pastors, the presiding bishop, general presbyters, International Presbytery, and the executive director of Finance and Administration, we suggest the following amendment to Section 4:

Newly established local churches will continue to report and send funds to their respective national/regional/state (N/R/S) office and the International Office as outlined by the current financial system. After 12 months of faithful participation of the newly organized church in the Present Financial System, the International Offices and the N/R/S office will issue an investment back to the local church, equivalent to 100 percent of the funds received from the newly established church, to support the ongoing work of the new church effective January 1, 2025.

Section 5: Thank You

The Finance & Stewardship Committee would like to express deepest gratitude to Bishop Paul Holt for his service as executive director of Finance and Administration. What Bishop Holt thought would be a short tenure of ministry at the International Offices became 16 years of stellar service to the Church of God of

Prophecy. He began his service as the assistant to the executive director of Finance and Administration. He was then appointed as executive director of Finance and Administration, serving with distinction for 13 years.

While his investment of skill, wisdom, and detail will be missed, his influence at the International Office level will last much longer. Thank you, Bishop Holt, for serving from “the integrity of your heart and the skillfulness of your hand” (ref. Psalm 78:70–72).

We commit you to, in your words, “follow God to the next classroom.” The state of Tennessee will be enriched by the ministry you and Barbara bring. Our heartfelt thanks to you both.

We also wish to thank Daniel Felipe for his service on this committee for the past eight years. We are committed to serving alongside him in his newly appointed position of Executive Director of Finance and Administration. Thank you, Daniel, for your willingness to accept this appointed responsibility.

Humbly Submitted,

Scott Gillum, Chair
Nathaniel Beneby
Clarence Berry
Clint Knowles
Cynthia Lawrence
Ryan Napalo
Rupert Neblett
Paulette Wilbanks

DECLINE COMPENSATION FORM



Name of Local Church:

Address of Local Church:

Date: _____

Pastor _____ has agreed to not receive the following in salary for serving as pastor of the local church at _____.

TO NOT RECEIVE:

- 100 Percent of Tithes
- _____ Percent of Tithes
- \$_____ Per Month in Tithes

The local church treasurer is to forward 10 percent of tithes to the International Offices and the designated amount required by the national/regional/state office. Also, since the pastor is not receiving the tithes, 10 percent of what the pastor would typically receive should be forwarded to the national/regional/state office.

Pastor's Signature: _____

Treasurer's Signature: _____

Date recorded and submitted to the local church conference:

Note: A signed copy of this document should be provided to the national/regional/state bishop, pastor, and the original should be kept in the church files. Once this document is recorded in a business conference, the tithes received will be used at the discretion of the local church, finance committee, or board of directors.

Note: We suggest this form be adopted at a business conference at the beginning of the church's fiscal year.

Note: A pastor may reverse compensation decline in a business conference if an event escalates the need to do so. However, we strongly advise against monthly and quarterly adjustments.



**CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY
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