

# **WE BELIEVE**

The Doctrinal Statement  
of the Churches of God,  
General Conference

Adopted by  
The General Conference in Session  
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# INTRODUCTION

In 1959, the General Eldership approved a declaratory and authoritative statement of *Teachings and Practices of the Churches of God*. That Bible-based declaration set forth in order things most surely believed among us. It was not a creed. The Bible is the only true standard of Christian faith and practice. The Bible is God's Word, a revelation from God to human beings.

The usefulness of such a declaration became apparent as early as 1844 when John Winebrenner prepared for the church twenty-seven points as her "avowed principles" constituting a "short ... declaration, showing her views, as to what may be called leading matters of faith, experience and practice." Again in 1863, as an outline for instruction in the blessings of the Christian faith, Christian H. Forney pointed out the value of "a handbook for the ministerial novitiate, the layman, the Sabbath School teacher, and all those who love the doctrines of the Church."

To meet the additional needs then emerging, the General Eldership in 1925, speaking in a representative capacity as our highest ecclesiastical body, adopted a doctrinal statement of fourteen unnumbered points, substantially the same as that of 1844 from a doctrinal standpoint. And again in 1959, to respond to emerging concerns, the Church adopted the statement known as *Teachings and Practices of the Churches of God*.

Trusting the Holy Spirit to guide in the interpretation and application of the Bible, the General Conference has again undertaken, on the basis of the consensus found across the Churches of God, to formulate a statement of our beliefs. We have entitled it *We Believe-the Doctrinal Statement of the Churches of God, General Conference*. It is the product of many persons. It has received the invaluable attention of four Consultations on Doctrine. It has been written, edited, evaluated, and rewritten by many faithful students of the Word drawn from all areas of the Churches of God.

A committee of writers has contributed to the text of this document using translations, not paraphrases, that best clarify and elucidate. These translations are identified according to the following key:

- KJV = King James Version
- NASB = New American Standard Version
- NIV = New International Version
- RSV = Revised Standard Version
- TEV = Today's English Version

The Churches of God, General Conference does not endorse any one translation. The statement on translations which concludes the section on "The Bible" expresses the sense of the Church.

*We Believe* was written under the following guidelines:

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

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# GOD

## **We believe in God.**

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

"God is spirit; and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24 NIV). God is not a physical being. He does not possess human features. The Bible speaks of God in human terms (i.e., God's arm, or ear, or eye) to provide a simpler, more comprehensible understanding. It does not give an exhaustive description of God.

## **We believe God is three persons but one God.**

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We often think of the Father as Creator; Jesus, the Son, as Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit as Comforter (John 14:26 KJV) or Counselor (NIV). Yet all these are the acts of the one God, for the Three are One. This is the doctrine of the Trinity.

That Jesus is one with the Father is clearly stated in several places in the New Testament (Titus 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:12). Thomas, confronted with the risen Jesus, declared: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28 KJV). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2) and the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19) present with us. Peter used the terms Holy Spirit and God interchangeably in Acts when he said to Ananias, ". . . why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3, 4 RSV).

There is only one God. Paul reminds us, "that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:4b-6 NIV). God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Father is God. Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit is God. (Ephesians 4:3-6).

## **We believe God is both unknowable and knowable.**

God is hidden and revealed, far (transcendent) and near (immanent). God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. God is greater than

our minds can comprehend. We are to honor, respect, and praise God. God is love (1 John 1:1-3). As Heavenly Father, he cares in a personal way about each person. This concept of God is known as Theism. It is a specific concept in contrast to Deism, which holds that God is transcendent but not immanent.

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

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

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

God is omnipresent (all present). God's presence is infinite—everywhere, always. As the Psalmist declares: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not darkness to thee, the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with thee" (Psalm 139:7-12 RSV).

**We believe in the holiness of God.**

To be holy means to be separated from and opposed to evil. "For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44 RSV). Moreover, to be holy means to be committed to purity and wholeness. "But just as He who calls you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy' " (1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV; also James 1:13).

It is God's holiness that provides for our deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. In this act of deliverance, God's holiness—separation from and opposition to evil—is expressed in love. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in atonement for our sin, wholeness is possible for all. God is holy, therefore committed to wholeness.

**We believe the work of God is primarily creation, grace, justice, mercy.**

God's work is creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ..." (Genesis 1:1 NIV). The full godhead was involved. "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ] ... all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1, 3 RSV; also Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:16). The Holy Spirit was involved. "The earth was without form, and void; and

darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2 KJV).

All things were created by God. God is the source and sustainer of all life. The original work of creation has been finished, but God continues to supplement that creation throughout history. This includes the re-creating of human beings fallen into sin. "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17 RSV). Therefore salvation is a part of the creative work of God.

God's work is grace. Grace is defined as unmerited, undeserved favor, given simply because of God's generosity and goodwill toward us. Grace is the reflection of God's mercy, extended to all who will receive it. An individual's response influences the giving of grace but does not determine it.

God's work is justice. Justice sets things straight and lines them up with God's will. It includes fair judgment and the enforcement of judgment's verdict. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed" (Psalm 103:6 NIV).

God's work is mercy. Mercy is the satisfaction of justice through the forgiveness of sin when guilty sinners acknowledge their sin, are sorry for it, and turn from it. "Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (James 2:13 NIV).

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

God is revealed through creation. God is more than creation, but the orderliness and majesty of creation reveal God's greatness.

God is revealed through history, especially Israel's history. The giving of the Law, the calling of leaders and prophets, the deliverance of Israel from various captivities, all reveal God's persistent involvement in human history and intention to be in relationship.

God is revealed most clearly through Jesus Christ. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, he sat down in heaven at the right side of God, the Supreme Power" (Hebrews 1:1-3 TEV). Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9 NIV). Jesus came to acquaint us more fully with God. To know God we must know Jesus Christ-his life, teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection. From Jesus we have learned that God is a fair but compassionate Father.

God is revealed through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who verifies the manifestation of God presented by Jesus (John 16:13-15).

God is revealed through the Church. The Church reflects and focuses on God's self-revelation. God's character is demonstrated most clearly through the Church when its members are holy and loving.

God is revealed through the Bible. Paul writes to Timothy, "... from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15-16 KJV).

# JESUS CHRIST

## **We believe In the pre-existence of Christ.**

Christ was alive when the world began. The Gospel of John commences, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2 KJV). Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as "the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:15-16 NIV).

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From before time, through time, and after time shall end, God always is—Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Empowerer, and Enlightener. To speak of the pre-existence of Christ, is to say that God's redemptive work has always been active, flowing eternally from the loving heart of the living God.

## **We believe In the incarnation.**

Incarnation literally means becoming flesh. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 KJV). A central fact of Christianity is that God became flesh in Jesus Christ according to the prophecy of Isaiah as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23 KJV). Christ came into the world—the meaning of advent—having been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20) and born of a virgin (Matthew 1:23). He came as the Son of God, God with us.

## **We believe Christ's nature is human and divine.**

Jesus was truly human. Physically he was fashioned in the womb of a human mother, conceived by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament's first glimpse of Jesus is as a baby lying in the manger. Luke reveals that he grew up as any other child of his day (Luke 2:40). Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the old covenant, thus fulfilling its requirements (Matthew 5:17) and laying the foundation for the new covenant.

As he matured, Jesus' humanity was evident. He grew tired (John 4:6), slept (Matthew 4:2), experienced hunger (Matthew 21:18), was thirsty (John 19:28), felt sorrow and wept (John 11:35), and experienced heartbreak and anger (Mark 3:5). He died. All the Gospels report his death in detail. Jesus was wholly human.

Jesus is wholly God. Paul wrote about Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:6-9 KJV).

John the Apostle records Jesus' claim to divinity when he said "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30 KJV) and "Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me" (John 12:45 TEV).

### **We believe the characteristics of Jesus' divinity are the very characteristics of God.**

Even though he was under the self-imposed limitations of the flesh, Jesus' divinity was present and evident. "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22 NIV). Or, as Paul put it, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10 NIV).

These characteristics are most apparent as we see the Father's omniscience and omnipotence flowing through Jesus. This omniscience (all knowledge) was demonstrated in his earthly ministry to the extent that Peter stated, "Lord, thou knowest all things" (John 21:17 KJV). Omnipotence (all power) was demonstrated as storms were calmed, all kinds of diseases healed, devils cast out, and the dead raised. His own testimony to his disciples was, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18 KJV).

### **We believe Jesus is Savior and Lord.**

Jesus is Savior. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17 KJV). This is the core of God's plan for mankind's redemption. Jesus is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8 KJV). John the Baptist declared upon seeing him: "Behold the

Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 KJV). Jesus Christ is our Savior through his obedience to God and death on the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus is Lord. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10-11 NIV). We acknowledge Jesus as Lord when we accept him as our Savior and allow him to be ruler of our lives.

### **We believe in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is historical fact, attested to by many witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Acts 2:32; Luke 24). His resurrection is the basis for the Christian hope of eternal life. It proves that God controls life and death. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins ... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20-22 NIV; also Romans 14:8-9).

Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9). Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him" (1 Peter 3:22 NIV). There Jesus serves as our advocate before the Father, and sends the Holy Spirit to comfort, empower, and guide our lives until he returns (Acts 2:32-33; Romans 1:4-5).

### **We believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ.**

This same Jesus who came to earth as God in the flesh will some day come again to receive us that we may be with him forever (Acts 1:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

## **We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is God.**

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

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

## **We believe that the Holy Spirit was active in the old covenant.**

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

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

## **We believe the Holy Spirit came into the world in a new way on the day of Pentecost.**

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), the church was born. A new era of the Holy Spirit was ushered in—the new covenant in which persons are placed by the Holy Spirit through the new birth into the family of God, the body of Christ, the Church. Appearing as "a rushing mighty wind" and "tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:2-3 KJV), the Holy Spirit embarked upon a new ministry of sanctification. Peter interpreted this event as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) and of the promise given by his Master (Acts 2:33).

### **We believe the Holy Spirit can be known and experienced.**

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39 NIV).

At the time Christ is received, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to give spiritual rebirth (John 3:3-6); the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5-6); the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39); entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:3); and immersion into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is what John the Baptist meant when he said that Jesus "... will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33 NIV; also John 1:29-34).

This baptism of the Spirit has been experienced by every Christian. "For we were all baptized by one spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV).

To bring persons to accept this relationship with God through Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts persons of their sin (John 16:9), Christ's righteousness (John 16:10), and judgment on evil (John 16:11).

### **We believe the Holy Spirit endows the followers of Christ with the "unity of the Spirit."**

The "unity of the Spirit" is a special communion that exists in the fellowship of persons who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Ephesians 4:3). In that relationship God's love flows from believer to believer to mold the followers of Christ into a functioning body of love as the family of God, the Church (Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 John 4:13-21).

### **We believe the Holy Spirit enables believers to grow spiritually.**

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of individual members of God's family, giving guidance, instruction, and power for the Christian lifestyle. Jesus said, "... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV).

At work in Christ's followers, the Holy Spirit's power produces life-building fruit that makes them effective witnesses before the watching world (Acts 1:8). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV). This fruit is the essential evidence of the presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer (Matthew 7:16). It is the process of sanctification.

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

The Holy Spirit works in the collective body of Christ, the Church. According to his wisdom and will, spiritual gifts are distributed among Christians for the up building of the Church (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11,25-30; Ephesians 4:11-13). "The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. ...It is one and the same Spirit who does all this; as he wishes, he gives a different gift to each person" (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 TEV). The Spirit knows what gifts are needed and which persons should receive them. These gifts come as the Holy Spirit chooses, for the good of the Church.

For this reason, the Churches of God encourages its members to exercise faith and submission in discovering the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit bestows upon each one. We trust the Holy Spirit to know what the Church needs and which members should be used to supply those needs.

One Christian's gifts should not be considered higher or lower than another's. "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (1 Corinthians 12:18, 25 NIV). "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Corinthians 12:6 NIV).

As Christians discover and exercise their spiritual gifts, "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16 NIV). Thus, the God of all the ages accomplishes his will in history and brings abundant life to his people, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zechariah 4:6 KJV).

## THE BIBLE

**We believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible authority, the Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice.**

Paul states, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV). Peter adds, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21 KJV).

Inspired of God or "God-breathed" means the Holy Spirit lifted the understanding of the speakers and writers above human limitations to give the Scriptures divine authority. Thus Paul could write, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 KJV).

**We believe God spoke, using the words of men to convey divine truth.**

Therefore, the Bible reflects the culture and environment of the writers as they studied and wrote. God was guiding in such a way that the written truth was his word. It is thus the infallible authority in everything Christians believe and do.

The Bible is made up of 66 separate books written across many centuries. It was written by various individuals who spoke different languages. The Bible is comprised of the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Each was inspired by God and all were brought together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to form what is called the canon of Holy Scripture. The Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. affirmed those 39 books recognized as the sacred Word given first to the Israelites. The Council of Carthage in 419 A.D. affirmed the 27 books of the New Testament recognized by the early Church, as genuine and authentic writings with apostolic authority, God's inspired Word. Thus, we believe that these 66 books together are the Word of God.

**We believe the central message of the Scriptures is the Good News that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**

Jesus is the Son of God who transforms life when individuals respond to his love, accepting him as Savior and Lord. John says, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15 NIV).

**We believe proper interpretation of the Scriptures comes from the Holy Spirit.**

"First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20 RSV). We believe the Scriptures are entrusted to the Church to be proclaimed throughout the world. The Church is the body of Christ under his headship and guided by the Holy Spirit. The unity of that body is vital to the effective proclamation of God's Word. Therefore, we understand that the interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is subject to the collective understanding of the body (Ephesians 4:1-19).

**We believe original infallible manuscripts were written in Hebrew and Greek and other ancient languages.**

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

# HUMANITY

## **We believe in our importance to God.**

God cares deeply for human beings and communities. His concern for humanity is grounded in his determined love for persons (Romans 5:8). This love is comprehensive, calling for a response not only in terms of individual salvation but also in the transformation of society. In the words of the prophet Amos, "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24 RSV). Christianity speaks for the wholeness and sacredness of human existence.

## **We believe in our created nature.**

God created human kind. The Bible makes this clear when it says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27 KJV). This means human beings, like everything else in creation, are utterly dependent on God. Nothing in creation has life in itself. "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7 RSV). The human race, and the world itself, continue to exist only because God continues to give life to his creation (John 1:1-9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

We are made in the image of God. This makes us different from all other living beings. We believe that the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27) allows us to commune with God and causes us to "hunger and thirst" when we are cut off from God. It should be noted that the "image of God" is given equally to men and women. It is neither "male" nor "female" but simply human.

Humanity was created as a "good" creature in a "good" creation. God gave human beings dominion over the world (Genesis 1:26-30), need for fellowship with other human persons (Genesis 2:18), sexuality (Genesis 1:27-28, 2:21-25), and freedom to make their own decisions (Genesis 2:15-17). God was pleased with the human creatures he had created and pronounced the world "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Thus, the Bible has a high view of the human race as it was created by God (Psalm 8).

### **We believe we have a sinful nature.**

The original goodness of creation was shattered by humanity's free choice to seek life apart from God. The story of this decision, often called "the Fall," is found in Genesis 3. The first sin was not simply disobeying a divine rule, but the effort to become independent of the Creator. The heart of the first sin is revealed in the words of the tempter to Eve: "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it [the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5 RSV).

This desire to seek life apart from God is the essence of sin. We desire to become our own creator, to become God. From this flows all human violence, degradation, and darkness. Paul says that the source of every human corruption is that humankind "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25 RSV).

We believe that the search for life apart from God leads not to life, but to death. For Adam and Eve, decision against God resulted in alienation from God, from each other, and from the earth they ruled (Genesis 3:8-24). We believe every person shares in that decision. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6 KJV). All human beings are sinners, alienated from their Creator, cut off from the One who gives life. The sinful nature of human beings has broken and corrupted their created nature.

### **We believe in the potential of our new nature in Christ.**

God does not leave us torn between a created nature and a sinful nature. We believe God has acted decisively in Jesus Christ to reconcile human beings to Himself and to deliver them from death to life.

We believe Jesus Christ was both fully divine and fully human. In becoming fully human, Jesus showed what it means to be human. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17 NIV; also Hebrews 2:5-18). Cheapened and degraded by sin, exploited by Satan, broken by despair and doomed to death, the human race has become ugly and hopeless. Yet beneath the horror and sin, God's image remains. In becoming human, Jesus made humanness beautiful again. In defiance of the darkness, Jesus made humanness shine. In his perfect humanity, Jesus has given us a new way to see ourselves and to see humankind (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

Jesus Christ not only became the example for redeemed humanity, but the sacrifice that made redemption possible. When he died on the cross, he atoned for all the sin of humanity. In the words of Paul,

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18 NIV).

Faith in Jesus Christ leads to new birth in which the believer is made a new creation and restored to the love and fellowship of God and God's people. The Christian is thus a new person, part of a new humanity. The new person in Christ is set apart to bear witness to the Kingdom of God and the promise of re-creation.

We believe that the ideal new person in Christ will be fully realized with the return of Jesus Christ. Until Jesus comes, believers are called to be part of a pilgrimage which daily leads from the brokenness of the old life more deeply into Christ's new life. The new person in Christ is thus the potential of every human being, a potential released in the new birth, and fulfilled in the triumph of Jesus Christ at the end of history. This potential is clearly stated in the Gospel of John: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12 RSV).

## **FREE MORAL AGENCY**

### **We believe God has created us as free moral agents.**

We are free to live and think and act according to our own will (Joshua 24:15; John 1:12; John 6:67). These Scriptures clearly indicate that we have freedom to accept or reject God, to obey or disobey. God does set boundaries on human behavior, however. We are not free to be God as some persons would like (Genesis 3:1-6). We are creature, not Creator.

### **We believe every individual is accountable to God for choices made.**

All persons experience inner tension between the desire to do right and the pressure to do wrong. This was true for the rich young ruler whose story is told in Mark 10:17-22. He freely chose his course of action and was accountable for his decision. This is true for all of us. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12 KJV).

### **We believe that since believers were free to make the decision to accept Christ as Savior and Lord, they are not less free at any time to turn away from God and be lost.**

If Christians refuse to acknowledge sin and the need for forgiveness, reject the Savior and Lord they had accepted, no longer follow Jesus (John 10:27), push Christ out of their lives, the salvation they once knew is no longer theirs (John 15:6). Peter tells us, "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of commandment that was passed onto them. Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit, 'and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud' " (2 Peter 2:20-22 NIV).

This does not mean that Christians have to live in constant fear of being lost. Relationship with God is not broken every time the Christian fails. John says, "I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1 NIV). Christians are also promised, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 KJV).

**We believe God provides power for living a victorious Christian life.**

As Christians abide in Christ, he abides in them (John 15:4). The Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5 KJV). We may forsake God. God will not forsake us.

"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13NIV). Because "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13 NIV), God's people can approach life with a sense of victory.

## REGENERATION

### **We believe In regeneration.**

The doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, is a central teaching of the Churches of God. This belief comes from the declaration of Christ to Nicodemus, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7 NASB).

Regeneration is the radical transformation of an individual life from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Christ speaks in Matthew of the necessity of becoming "like children." The disciples came to Jesus with the question, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus set a little child in their midst. Then he declared, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-4 NASB).

Christ thus teaches the necessity of entering into a new kind and way of life, lived according to new principles of life. Through regeneration a new life is made possible by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It involves a new relationship to God, a new relationship to others, and a new attitude toward the world.

### **We believe we must respond to God's offer.**

This new life is a supernatural change. It comes to the individual not by human efforts, but by the power and influence of God. This truth is expressed by John, who speaks of persons "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13 KJV). God does not give new life to someone who is not willing to be changed. God offers salvation, but does not force any person to receive it. God does not destroy or alter our free moral choice to accept or reject this offer.

To experience regeneration, we must recognize our need for a new life, and that Jesus Christ is the only way to receive it. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV). This involves recognizing one's sinfulness. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 KJV). "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17 NASB).

Regeneration is needed by all who are in a state of accountability before God. This means their spiritual understanding has matured to the point that they are capable of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They are able both to understand their own personal sinfulness and to respond to God independently. Although often occurring in later childhood, this may vary according to the spiritual perceptiveness and mental capacity of the person.

We must recognize that our sin is separating us from God, and must be willing to repent. Repentance means willingness to confess sinfulness and to turn from a sinful life. With repentance comes God's forgiveness. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19 NIV).

Through a sincere response to the marvelous forgiving love of God, Christ comes into our life and makes us new. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17 RSV).

## JUSTIFICATION

**We believe we are justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law, or by works of our own righteousness.**

Justification means to be put in right relationship with God. Paul said, "by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free" (Romans 3:24 TEV). Simultaneous with our "thorough change" (John Winebrenner's definition of regeneration), we are placed in right relationship with God (justified through faith).

The major emphasis in justification is that it is an act of God. We are not capable of doing it for ourselves. God justifies an individual on the basis of the merits of Christ. Justification is given to, and received by, the sinner through faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16-21). God declares the sinner cleansed from sin, released from sin's penalty, and restored as righteous in God's sight.

**We believe the Scriptures teach four essentials in the act of justification: remission, restoration, God-bestowed righteousness, and new standing before God.**

Remission means that the justified believer is freed from the demands of the law because those demands have been satisfied in Christ. "But the person who depends on his faith, not on his deeds, and who believes in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is his faith that God takes into account in order to put him right with himself" (Romans 4:5 TEV). Remission is more than pardon from sin. It is a declaration by God that the sinner's guilt is forgiven in Christ.

Restoration means to be declared personally righteous in Christ. Sinners are not simply acquitted, they are restored as if they had never sinned. "Consider the experience of Abraham; as the scripture says, 'He believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous'" (Galatians 3:6 TEV).

God-bestowed righteousness means to be made right in God's sight because of Christ's presence in the believer. "But God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus, and God has made Christ to be our wisdom. By him we are put right with God; we become God's holy people and are set free" (1 Corinthians 1:30 TEV).

The new standing before God is an absolute interchange of position. Christ takes the place of the sinner, being made sin in our behalf and judged for our sin. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21 KJV). The sinner then stands in the righteousness of Christ and is a child of God. "God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons" (Galatians 4:4-5 TEV).

# SANCTIFICATION

## **We believe sanctification is both instantaneous and progressive.**

The biblical concept of sanctification is a process of bringing the whole of life into line with the will of God. Its basic meaning is to set life apart in consecration of one's total self to God. To sanctify anything is to declare that it belongs to God.

In the Old Testament, sanctification was primarily used to consecrate places, days, seasons, and objects of worship. New Testament usage is limited chiefly to persons. It portrays a Savior who was so completely consecrated to God that those who believe in him can also be sanctified.

Sanctification of the person is instantaneous and simultaneous with regeneration. Sanctification of the nature is a continuing growth in grace, truth, and relationship with God.

Justification is God's imputed work upon us; sanctification is God's imparted work within us. While justification refers to a change in status before God, sanctification refers to a change within one's being. This change in being begins at the time of regeneration and continues in a gradual growth of Christ likeness. It could be said that sanctification is to regeneration as growth is to birth.

## **We believe transformation of the believer's life and character follows from our consecration to God.**

Those who belong to Christ are called to live in him. "I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you" (Ephesians 4:1 TEV). "You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right side of God. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your real life is Christ and when he appears, then you too will appear with him and share his glory" (Colossians 3:1-4 TEV; also Colossians 3:5-14; Romans 6-8).

Ability to make one's lifestyle more Christ like is given through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is a lifelong process, daily appropriated through surrender of life to God. It is not complete in any given act. It is not complete short of the life to come (1 John 3:2).

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

Holiness is a characteristic of God and should mark the Christian walk. "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy' " (1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV). This is a command, but also implies that believers are to choose to be holy. We continue to be free moral agents throughout the process of sanctification. Holiness does not mean sinless perfection, or that at some point our fallen nature is eradicated. Sin and our fallen nature continue to be present with us in this life (Galatians 5:17). Yet God wants a holy people, and the believer must deliberately decide to yield life to the Holy Spirit to be holy. Holiness of life is not how much we have of the Holy Spirit, but how much the Holy Spirit has of us.

Holy living is possible only as the believer experiences a moment-by-moment yielding to the Holy Spirit. Followers of Christ depend on the power and help of the Holy Spirit to produce Christ's life in us, Paul said: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2 KJV). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:22-26 NASB). Holy living is the believer's privilege and responsibility because it will bring honor and glory to God.

# THE CHURCH

## **We believe the Church is God's called-out people.**

The word for Church in New Testament Greek is *ekklesia*, denoting "that which is called out." *Ekklesia* suggested an assembly of citizens called together for legislative business. Paul and other writers undoubtedly had in mind the Hebrew word *qahal* which also meant "called out" and referred to the "assembly" or "congregation" of Israel. *Ekklesia* was the equivalent of *qahal* in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament used by early Christians.

God has called the Church into being. Only by God's mercy and grace is the salvation of sinful beings made possible. The Church is composed of all who have responded to God's call through the saving love of his Son, Jesus Christ. Just as God called Israel to be his chosen people under the old covenant, God is now calling the Church to be the new Israel under the new covenant (Romans 4:16).

## **We believe the Church is "the body of Christ."**

One of the significant images of the Church in the scriptures is the "body of Christ" (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:4-16). "We, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another" (Romans 12:5 RSV).

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

The Church is often called the "people of God." The Greek word for "people" is *laos* and is the root of the term "laity." Christians are described as "a chosen people (*laos*), a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

### **We believe the church enjoys a special kind of fellowship.**

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

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

The Church in the New Testament is the household of faith and the family of God (Ephesians 2:19). Paul encourages the Church to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10 KJV). Timothy was told, "Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as if he were your father. Treat the younger men as your brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, with all purity" (1 Timothy 5:1-2 TEV). The Ephesians are instructed to be "imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1 RSV). Relationship between a husband and wife is compared to the love between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:21- 33). Christians are reminded that "he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).

### **We believe the Church is to apply New Testament principles to its life.**

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

John Winebrenner, the earthly founder of what has become the Churches of God, General Conference, had a high view of the Church. Based on a thorough study of the scriptures, he saw "Church of God" to be the biblical name for the Church (1 Corinthians 1:2); the presbyterial system of elders (Acts 14:23) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:10) as the biblical form of church government; and the new birth as the only way of entering the Church (1 John 5:1).

The Church exists only because of the grace of God and the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It consists of all persons who accept Christ as personal Savior and Lord, leading a regenerate life. It is not limited to a particular denomination.

## THE ORDINANCES

**We believe Christ has given the church three divine ordinances.**

The term "ordinances" is used when speaking of Baptism, Feet Washing, and the Lord's Supper. Our understanding of the term "ordinance" comes from two traditions. One relates to the observance of the Pass-over. Another comes from Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth. The term "ordinance" is used with reference to the memorial observance of the Old Covenant Passover: "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever" (Exodus 12:14 KJV). The Church has historically obeyed Paul's directive to the believers in Corinth, "Now I praise you brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2 KJV).

We use the term "ordinance" instead of "sacrament." The word "sacrament" is not used because in its historical development it implies the imparting of saving grace. We believe God uniquely blesses members of the family of God as they participate in these special acts of worship (John 13:17). Salvation, however, comes only from believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. H. Forney, an early leader in our church, in *The Philosophical Basis of the Ordinances* (Harrisburg: Central Publishing House, 1906), listed five characteristics necessary for a ceremony to be classified as an ordinance:

1) *Divine Authority*. To be an ordinance the practice must have been instituted by Christ. This means he ordered it and observed it.

2) *Formal Observance*. A Christian ordinance is a rite. It is a visible ceremony which celebrates deep spiritual truth.

3) *Material Elements*. The elements are natural symbols, things tangible, selected by Christ because of their particular power to portray spiritual reality.

4) *Redemptive History*. An ordinance must point directly to a great historical fact in Christ's mission to redeem humanity.

5) *Spiritual Experience*. An ordinance is expressive of some great fact in our spiritual experience.

# BAPTISM

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

Baptism is an ordinance of the Church. This means it is "ordained" or ordered by Jesus Christ. Jesus commissioned his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19 RSV).

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward grace. When we believe in and commit ourselves to following Christ, a fundamental change takes place. We receive God's acceptance, forgiveness, and direction for living. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!" (2Corinthians 5:17NIV) Baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer's participation in that divine process.

The ordinance of baptism is a public symbol. When we are baptized, we are giving public witness that we believe in Christ and are committed to following him.

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

The baptism of Jesus signified three things:

1) *Obedience to God the Father.* Regarding his baptism, Jesus said, "Let it be so now, it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15 NIV).

2) *Servanthood.* By being baptized Jesus expressed his incarnate presence among us, as one of us, to serve us.

3) *Acceptance of the sin-bearing ministry of the cross.* Because Jesus had no sin, his baptism anticipated the sin he would bear for us on Calvary's cross. The Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29 NIV).

## **We practice "believer's baptism."**

Those who profess faith in Christ and express commitment to follow him are eligible for baptism. The early Church made confession and repentance prerequisites for baptism. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38 NIV). The Ethiopian official asked Philip, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36 NIV).

Since baptism properly comes after an expressed faith in Christ and conscious commitment to follow him, we believe only believers with the

maturity to make such commitment are qualified candidates for baptism.

Because we believe that only willing response to God by the individual brings salvation, the Churches of God neither practice nor see the necessity of infant baptism. We trust that those who have not yet reached the state of accountability are safe in the grace of God (Romans 7:7-12). Nonetheless, we believe that the child shares the benefits of Christian fellowship in the nurturing ministries of responsible parents and the Church. This responsibility is accepted and made meaningful in the service of Presentation of Children for the Lord's Blessing.

### **We believe baptism is not essential for salvation.**

Paul tells us, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9-10 NIV). Because believing in Christ is the only requirement for receiving saving grace, we see baptism as a public witness of grace already received. In keeping with Christ's example and teaching, we encourage every believer to participate in the ordinance of baptism as an act of obedience and witness.

Because baptism is not essential for salvation, and acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord is the essential requirement for salvation and admission to the church, we grant membership to believers who have not yet been baptized.

### **We believe the biblical form of baptism is by immersion.**

Matthew's report of John's ministry is, "Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Matthew 3:6 NIV). Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus' baptism. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water" (Matthew 3:16 NIV), and "As Jesus was coming up out of the water ..." (Mark 1:10 NIV). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him." The Scriptures conclude, "They came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39 NIV).

No other mode of baptism is compatible with the New Testament nor as graphic in illustrating the meaning of Christian faith. The Bible says immersion was the form of baptism administered by John the Baptist and the apostles. Paul's explanation of the symbolism of baptism confirms that immersion is the form to be used. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live new life" (Romans 6:4 NIV).

## FEETWASHING

**We believe in the ordinance of feet washing as a celebration of the incarnation.**

We remember in this ordinance that Jesus Christ was the Word become flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). In the words of Philippians 2:7-8, Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (RSV). In describing what happened in the upper room, John affirmed the incarnation with the words, "Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper" (John 13:3-4 RSV).

We understand this ordinance to represent his giving up of his heavenly glory to become a human being, and his willingness to take the form of a servant.

**We believe the service of feet washing reminds us of our calling to be servants.**

As Christians, we are called to be servants with our Servant Lord. In this ordinance we commemorate the meaning of Christian life as a life of service. Jesus made this clear in the upper room when he washed his disciples' feet. "When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.' Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master" (John 13:12-16 RSV).

Speaking to disciples anxious for position and power who equated greatness with rank and authority, Jesus said, "Whoever would be first among you must also be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45 RSV).

In the Church of God at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche may have been caught up in the same self-centeredness as the disciples (Philippians 4:2). Paul counseled the Church, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. ... Have this

mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3, 5 RSV). Having the mind of Christ Jesus is being like our Savior "who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7 RSV).

Whatever our position in society, washing one another's feet reminds Christians of their calling to serve one another as brothers and sisters equal in Christ.

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

John said of Jesus in the upper room, as he was about to wash his disciples' feet, "Having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1 RSV). "His own" whom he loved "to the end" included Judas, deceiver and betrayer.

After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he gave them the new commandment to "love one another, even as I loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35 RSV). What is more essential to the life and well-being of the Church than that Christians truly love one another?

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

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14 RSV). As we move toward the heavenly city, we need each other and have the privilege and responsibility to serve one another. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 NIV). It should be noted, however, that we need to allow others to "bear our burdens." It is sometimes more difficult in the Church to allow ourselves to be ministered to than to minister.

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

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

The ordinance of feet washing is generally observed in conjunction with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It can help us to come to the Lord's table properly prepared, in right relationship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus tells us, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against

you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24 RSV).

Since time is not an essential element in observing the Lord's Supper, the ordinance of feet washing is effective whether or not in company with the Lord's Supper. The celebration of the incarnation, the reminder that the Christian is called to be a servant, the need to express our Christian love and affection, and to minister and be ministered to. All are present whenever we observe this ordinance.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

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

The Lord's Supper, also known as Communion, was instituted by Jesus on the evening preceding the crucifixion, during the Passover Feast (Luke 22:11-15). The Passover celebration commemorated the redemption of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. "It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations" (Exodus 12:42 RSV). For the Christian, the Lord's Supper commemorates the redemptive act of Christ in establishing the new covenant. "You must remove the old yeast of sin so that you will be entirely pure. Then you will be like a new batch of dough without any yeast, as indeed I know you actually are. For our Passover Festival is ready, now that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7 TEV).

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

The Lord's Supper is recorded in three gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20). These passages reveal that the broken bread represents the body of Christ as it was broken in the crucifixion.

The cup passed among the disciples symbolized the blood Jesus shed for the sins of mankind. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22 RSV).

In receiving the bread and the cup, Christians remember that because Christ died they receive forgiveness for sin. Communion is also an act of obedience. "This is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. ... This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me!" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25 KJV).

As Christians live in constant expectation of Christ's return, they prepare the way for him by continuing to proclaim his death through Communion. "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 RSV).

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

Christians believe that Christ will return for his followers, the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). In receiving the bread and the cup of Communion, the people of God testify that they "wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:13-14 NIV).

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

To participate in this ordinance one must have personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Anyone who confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord is eligible and invited to participate in this ordinance. The Lord's Supper should always be observed decently and in good order. It must never be taken lightly or practiced irreverently.

The Bible clearly counsels that participation in the Lord's Supper should come only after serious self-examination. "So then, everyone should examine himself first, and then eat the bread, and drink from the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28 TEV). The concerns of self-examination include being truly committed to Jesus Christ, being conscious of what he did on the Cross, and having a loving regard for his body (1 Corinthians 11:17-32).

Communion is not merely a ritual. It is fellowship and involvement in the life of Christ and his body, the Church. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 KJV).

## **THE PRESENTATION OF CHILDREN FOR THE LORD'S BLESSING**

### **We believe in the presentation of children for the Lord's blessing.**

In this service, children are set apart for the Lord. The congregation joins with the parents in pledging themselves to the Christian nurture of those children.

### **We believe children are a gift of God.**

We read in Genesis 33:5 NIV, "Esau looked up and saw the women and children. 'Who are these with you?' he asked. Jacob answered, 'They are the children God has graciously given your servant.'" The great judge and prophet Samuel was dedicated to the Lord even before birth. After Samuel had been weaned, Hannah said, "I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:27-28 NIV).

### **We believe children are a part of the covenant community.**

Children born to parents who are in the household of faith experience God's love through the care and loving concern of their Christian parents and the Church. This service of dedication recognizes their participation in the life of the family of God.

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

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NIV). The New Testament directs parents to raise their children with Christian discipline and instruction (Ephesians 6:4). Throughout the Scriptures God's people are urged to teach and nurture children by word and example. "Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9 NIV; see also Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

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

As children need warm relationships in their families, so they need warm relationships in the family of God. Such nurture is needed for both parents and children. This calls for a variety of educational opportunities and constant encouragement. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another as a fellowship of God's people" (Hebrews 10:25 NIV). Members of the congregation serve as models for parents and children, demonstrating what it means to be a Christian.

**We believe we ought to follow Jesus in Ministering to children.**

"Little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'" (Matthew 19:13-14NIV). Jesus showed deep appreciation and concern for children. So should the Church.

## **THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION AND WHOLENESS**

### **We believe in the healing power of faith for the whole person.**

The Bible's concept of healing is achieving wholeness-spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, and social.

Christ's mission in the world was to bring this wholeness. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he fulfilled God's plan to restore vitality and mend humanity's brokenness. Through faith in Christ, we may experience healing which repairs the broken heart, making us free to share life, to forgive the past, and to spread faith's healing to others. This healing of the inner person often brings healing to the physical body.

God desires us to be whole in body, mind, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Although God is not the source of our afflictions, he permits them, and may use them in different ways: for his glory, (John 11:1-4); or to demonstrate his power, (2Corinthians 12:7-10); or to enable us to understand the sufferings of others so that we may comfort and encourage them (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). In the Old Testament, we see God as the one who wants to heal (Exodus 23:25-26). Healing was linked to confession of sin and a desire to obey God's precepts.

The New Testament contains at least 26 accounts of Christ's healing power. He was concerned about people's physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. He commissioned his disciples to go, heal, and preach (Luke 10:9). Physical health was related to spiritual health (John 5:14). Modern medical understanding affirms the inter-relatedness of physical and spiritual health.

### **We believe that all suffering became a part of human experience at the fall of humankind into sin.**

Through Satan, sin entered the World, and with it sickness and death. The origin of sin was not with God but with Satan and man. Satan continually endeavors to use suffering to accomplish his goals (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul describes the resulting condition as "the whole creation groans" (Romans 8:22 NASB). We are part of that creation.

**We believe that sickness and suffering are not necessarily the result of the sin of the sufferer.**

The disciples posed this question in John 9:1-2. Jesus replied that this man's blindness was not caused by his sin, or that of his parents. Disease and suffering can be caused by sexual transmission, by using drugs, by poor hygiene, and by improper nutrition. These may be the fault of the victim, or his parents. Even with some of these causes, as well as in genetic disorders from viral diseases or chemical agents, both the transmitter and the sufferer may be innocent parties.

Although sickness and suffering can be the result of specific sin (John 5:10-15; 1 Corinthians 11:29-30), sin is not to be considered the usual cause (John 9:3-4; Acts 3:1-9).

**We believe that God has the power to heal all diseases and to reconcile all circumstances to his ultimate will.**

God's power is displayed in the knowledge and skills given to medical personnel. Sometimes healing is unexplained except as God's miraculous intervention. There are also situations where the power of God's Spirit assists us in dealing with our circumstances.

Healing involves more than physical well being. Death, itself, may be an avenue of perfect healing for those who consider their earthly existence as temporary in view of the heavenly inheritance (Romans 14:8; Philippians 3:10-11).

While God does hear and answer prayer (John 15:7), it is not always within God's purpose to bring about complete physical healing. God's ability to heal and his desire to heal are not one and the same (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Physical healing is not necessarily a measure of faith. We may not assume that faith is lacking when healing is not given.

**We believe that the Church is a means of God's grace in healing.**

God has charged the Church with the task of changing people's lives through the ministry of the word and through the care and concern of its people. A loving church first loves its Lord, then shares that love with the world, becoming a body through which Christ can heal.

Becoming a Christian and a part of God's Church brings emotional health that has its roots in the freedom to be and to become that which salvation provides. As an important step in the emotional healing process, the Church offers acceptance to those who are struggling against themselves. It offers acceptance of persons as they are. The Church offers love, its skills in relationship, and its time to listen. Emotional healing is also encouraged through the counsel and care of the body of Christ for one another, and for those outside the body who are hurting.

The gift of a listening ear with an understanding heart is sometimes the greatest gift God's people can give.

Intercessory prayer is an important aspect of the Church's ministry. As the Church joins together in prayer for the needs of each other, the power of God is experienced. The unity of the body creates a bond that gives hope, encouragement, and sharing of burdens.

The prayer of faith can bring healing. Paul, "after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him," (Acts 28:8 NIV). Prayer for the sick involves Christians being right with the Lord and others, a desire to use the requested healing for God's glory, and a willing peaceful submission in faith to God who is all-wise, all-powerful, and all-compassionate.

Anointing with oil is a Biblical method of offering prayer on behalf of those who desire healing. According to James 5:14, anointing is to be requested by the one who desires healing. The elders and pastor of the church are to participate in this "anointing service," recognizing that we are asking for God's will to be accomplished and for our acceptance of that will. We understand the oil to be symbolic of the Holy Spirit. It does not contain power in itself to bring healing, nor do the hands of those who pray or administer the anointing. Rather, it is the prayer which is offered in faith that brings us to God in submission for his will to be accomplished in our lives.

Prayer prepares the sick to accept the healing of the whole person. Guidance is received for those who will be God's instruments in the healing. Prayer opens lives to the healing power of God to work in the spirit, mind, and body of those who are sick.

The faith accompanying prayer brings assurance that wholeness has been granted (Matthew 21:22), though there may be no immediate outward evidence. Faith also recognizes that ultimate healing comes when Christians are released from corruptible bodies to join God for eternity (Revelation 21:4).

# THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD

## **We believe Christians should be servants in their relationships with God and others.**

Jesus defined his own ministry in words from the prophet Isaiah, "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 NIV). This is also our mission.

Jesus chose the image of a servant to describe the lifestyle of his followers. The Greek word used was *diakonos*, which means "servant," or "minister." It is also the root of the word "deacon."

Jesus set the example himself, being God's obedient servant. He reminded his disciples that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28 NIV). In the upper room Christ washed his disciples' feet and told them "the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him" (John 13:16 KJV).

In the early church, persons were set apart for special ministries, including teachers, preachers, apostles, and deacons. Every person had his "ministry" according to his spiritual gifts. No ministry was insignificant. Christ teaches that even ministry to the least of his brothers is ministry to him (Matthew 25:34-40). That service is to the destitute and those in physical, social, and spiritual need. James warned that without the works of a servant, faith is dead (James 2:14-18).

One special ministry given to all Christians is the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation of the world to God and of persons to each other is the purpose for which Christ came. We are charged with carrying on the work of Christ as agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

In Luke 10:26-37, Jesus affirmed the importance of the Old Testament teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18 NIV). Paul also saw this as the summary of commandments dealing with human relationships (Romans 13:8-10).

Servanthood includes responsibility for others. Paul said it is sometimes necessary to modify our actions for the sake of those who are weaker (1 Corinthians 10:23-33). Peter cautioned to use Christian freedom wisely (1 Peter 2:13-17).

**We believe Christians have a primary obligation to be a witness to the Good News.**

All Christians enjoy the benefits of the priesthood of believers. They can and should make intercession to God through Christ, their High Priest, on behalf of themselves and others. Christ has made us "priests to serve his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6 NIV). All the people of God—lay persons and clergy—have the right and responsibility to minister for God, remembering that "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20 RSV).

As God's special envoys, we are representatives of the Kingdom of God and messengers of the Good News that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 KJV). Jesus' compassion offered people an opportunity to discover new life. We must "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9 RSV).

We are to witness for Christ by the words of our mouth and every action of our lives as we show the indwelling Christ living and working through us (Philippians 2:15; Colossians 3:17). All that we do is to be done to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Each individual is created in the image of God. Because "we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, and wrong. ...slaves to passions" (Titus 3:3 TEV), we do not condemn those who still are. All persons should be viewed as potential believers (John 4:3-26). Our attitude should be that of hating the sin but loving the sinners, as we seek to affirm their worth and value to God, and to persuade them to abandon their sin and turn to Christ.

**We believe Christians have a responsibility to society.**

Jesus said his followers were to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). In order to reflect the light of Christ in the world, Christians must be aware of what is taking place in society, affirming those things which are beneficial, and denouncing those things which tear down. The sin and failure of the nation must be exposed if there is to be healing in the land. This was the message God sent through the prophets.

Each individual Christian, each local congregation, and each organization within the church must, after much prayer, decide where it fits in

God's plan and what Christ would have it do. The way in which God can use us is limited only by our lack of imagination, or our refusal to serve.

**We believe the Christian has a dual citizenship.**

The people of God live in the world but are not to be of the world in motives, desires, or actions (John 17:14). They are directed not to conform to this world, but to lead transformed lives in honor of Christ (Romans 12:1-2). "The Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit in those who belong to the world" (1 John 4:4 TEV).

As Christians we are called to be good citizens. Paul advised, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. "The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1 NIV).

When the will of society and the will of God come into direct, irresolvable conflict, we should do all within legal limits to change man's laws. If this is not possible, like the apostles before us, we have no choice but to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). This is in accord with the teaching of Jesus to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17 NIV) and to "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28 KJV). Civil disobedience is never a course to be embarked upon lightly, but only when necessary in order to be obedient to God.

To obey God's laws may require us to accept persecution for the cause of Christ. Jesus said, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39 NIV). Meekness is not weakness. Jesus calls us to reflect his extraordinary courage: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 NIV).

As we seek to serve God, our guiding principle must be to let God's love flow through us to society. We may take only such action as will bring honor to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## LAST THINGS

### **We believe in the Second Coming and ultimate victory of Jesus Christ.**

This belief is expressed in the doctrine of Last Things. Differing interpretations of what the Bible teaches about Last Things are held today by honest persons of faith within our fellowship. The two predominant interpretations in the Churches of God are premillennialism and amillennialism.

Premillennialism teaches that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs including the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy, the rapture of the dead and living Christians, the appearance of the Antichrist, and a great tribulation. Then Christ will return and establish his kingdom on earth for 1000 years, the millennium. This is followed by a rebellion led by Satan, then the ultimate triumph of Christ's initial coming will reach its final fulfillment.

Amillennialism teaches that Christ—in his death on the cross and resurrection—has won the decisive victory over sin, death, and Satan. For amillennialists, the kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope. The present period will be brought to a climax by the dramatic return of Christ. They look to the Second Coming which will be preceded by certain signs such as: the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy and tribulation, and the coming of the Antichrist. Since many of these signs are already present to the amillennialist, the next step is the return of Christ, the general resurrection, and the ascension of all believers.

These two views differ somewhat on the order, duration, and significance of these Last Things. What is held in common, however, forms the basis of the following teachings on Last Things.

### **We believe that Almighty God will bring history to its proper close in his way and in his time.**

Our task is to build Christ's Church on earth until that day comes, enlisting and preparing persons for everlasting life with God and God's people (Mark 13:33-37).

Jesus warned against speculations about the end times and temptations to fix dates. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36 KJV; also Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7).

**We believe that the Scriptures do speak of times and events which are part of the movement of history toward the fulfillment of the purposes of God.**

Jesus indicated that there are signs of his coming, in order to reassure his followers of this hope. There will be false Christs (Matthew 24:5, 24). There will be wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6). The Gospel will be preached in all the world (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10). There will be convulsions in nature; there will be famines and pestilences (Matthew 24:7).

These signs and others have appeared at various times and in varying degrees to alert us and keep us vigilant. But we cannot pinpoint the time of Christ's coming. The Bible does not answer all our questions about Last Things. It reveals what we need to know about God and his plan for the world. It is clear about our need for redemption through Christ, the nature of the life to be lived under the power of the indwelling Spirit, and the assurance and hope of everlasting life.

**We believe the message of the end times is always one of victory and fulfillment for the Christian and the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.**

There will be a tribulation, but we are not to fear. There is victory in Christ's overcoming power (John 16:33). The messages of the world will become confusing, but there is certainty in God's Word (Luke 21:33). In Jesus Christ, God will consummate all things when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15 KJV).

Righteousness will reign (2 Peter 3:13); there will be no imperfection (Revelation 21:27); there will be no night (Revelation 22:5); there will be no sorrow or pain or death (Revelation 21:4). God will dwell with his people in the beauty and unity of God's great plan (Revelation 21:3).

**We believe the mission of God's people until that day is to be salt and light in the world.**

Although we are "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13 KJV), there is work for us to do. "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3 NIV). To look for Christ's return and its consummating events is not to retreat from life and abandon our mission as salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

Peter sensed the pain of his people in the turbulent times of their Christian pilgrimage. He was aware of the impact of persecution and admonished the saints to be faithful and steadfast. He encouraged them with the words, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives

as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in, the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace, with him" (2 Peter 3:11-14 NIV; also 2 Peter 3:8-18). "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as [God] is pure" (1 John 3:3 NIV).

### **We believe in the bodily resurrection of believers.**

Those who are alive and "in Christ" at the time of his triumphant return will be drawn unto him. As Christ was raised from the dead, "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20 KJV), the dead in Christ shall rise also to share in the culmination of God's eternal kingdom. It is the final sharing in the promise of eternal life. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19 KJV). "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 KJV).

This will not simply be a resurrection of our spirit. It will be a bodily resurrection, but we will have a changed body, a glorified body. "The body is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44 NIV). And those alive at the time of Christ's return will also be changed. "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:53 NIV; also 15:52).

It is through this bodily resurrection that Christ's ultimate promise is fulfilled. "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' " (1 Corinthians 15:54 NIV).

### **We believe judgment will accompany Christ's return.**

This will occur "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 RSV).

Judgment has been committed to Christ (John 5:22; Acts 17,31). Some judgments are past. Christ in his coming as the light of the world has judged the world's darkness. As Christians we are not condemned, because we have been pardoned by accepting and believing in Christ (John 3:18). There is, however, judgment of deeds for all (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

Christians need not fear judgment. Instead they should welcome it, because it is the occasion for their final vindication in the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-13). God knows our love, and will deal with us fairly. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25 KJV). The salvation and worthiness of the believer is already assured by God's action. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 KJV).

The message of the Last Things is a call to a living hope. It makes us alive to our mission and assures us of ultimate victory in Christ. When all things have been placed under Christ's rule, we shall give thanks to God "who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:1 2-13 NIV).

# GLOSSARY

The following glossary is provided to ease the reader's use of *We Believe*. The page where the word first appears is indicated in parentheses () following each brief definition.

**Abundant** - Very plentiful, ample, well-supplied, rich. (16)

**Accountability** - Being responsible for one's own acts, and answerable to God for these acts. (25)

**Acknowledge** -To admit to be true, to accept the fact of. To recognize a truth and act accordingly. (22)

**Advent** - A coming or arrival. Anticipating the birth of Christ. (11)

**Alienation** - Being withdrawn and detached, in a state of unfriendliness and separation, after having been united before. (20)

**Amillennialism** - A major interpretation of "Last Things." See the section on "Last Things" for a fuller treatment. (48)

**Antichrist** - Also known as the "Man of lawlessness." In teachings concerning the "Last Things," the Antichrist appears, beginning the time of the great apostasy and tribulation, as the climactic personification of the spirit of Antichrist, which has always been present. This spirit (and the person himself) is continually working against the Gospel, and tries to place himself in a position above God. (48)

**Apostasy** - A departure from what was believed before. Enmity, opposition against the faith after having previously believed in its teachings. (48)

**Apostle** - Literally, "a great person sent forth," that is, sent on a special mission. In the New Testament, any of the original Twelve Disciples, also Matthias and Paul. Paul identifies "apostle" as a spiritual gift.(45)

**Apostolic Authority** - The authority possessed by the original Twelve, and Paul. It is derived from a direct revelation from God; and from this the New Testament writers wrote inspired, authoritative Scripture. (17)

**Ascension** -The bodily rising into Heaven. The departure from earth, proceeding upward into heaven. (13)

**Atonement** - Satisfaction given for wrongdoing. Act of reconciliation. The effect of Jesus' death in redeeming and reconciling us to God. (8)

**Attest** - Declaring to be true or genuine. (13)

**Authority** - The power or right to give commands and expect and enforce obedience. The Bible is authoritative because it is able to require a person's obedience to its demands. (17)

**Baptism, Baptize** - A ceremony of the Church which marks the beginning of the baptized person's life in and identification with the Church, or the Body of Christ. A ritual in which the person is immersed in water in order to signify the deeper meaning of Baptism—that is, repentance and commitment to God's will. An ordinance of the Church. For a fuller treatment of the Churches of God's understanding of Baptism, see the section on "Baptism." (33)

**Beseech** - To ask urgently, with complete sincerity. (29)

**Bestow, Bestowed** - Given as a gift. (16)

**Body of Christ** - A New Testament image of the Church in which Christ is the Head and individual believers are members of the Body. (14)

**Characteristic** - Feature or quality that distinguishes something. (12)

**Child Dedication** - A service of the Church in which the child is "set apart" for God; the parents promise to raise the child in obedience to the Holy Spirit and to Scripture; the congregation pledges its participation in the Christian nurture of the child. Because of our belief in baptism of believers only, the Churches of God do not practice Infant Baptism. See "The Presentation of Children for the Lord's Blessing." (40)

**Church** - All Christians who are considered as one body. (14, 30)

**Clergy** - Persons ordained for religious service; ministers. (46)

**Co-Equal** - Equal; on the same level. (14)

**Co-Eternal** - Existing together eternally. (14)

**Collective** - Gathered into a whole. Of or by all the individuals in a group acting together. (16)

**Commemorate** - To keep alive the memory of something, especially by ceremony. (35)

**Commence** - Begin, start, originate. (11)

**Commitment** - The act of giving over something of one's own for safekeeping; of binding to a person or a cause as by a pledge. To be committed to Christ means to be unwaveringly dedicated to his commands and his cause, while at the same time entrusting one's life to Christ's keeping. (33)

**Communion** - The Lord's Supper (see below). Also, an intimate relationship with deep understanding. The act of sharing, possessing in common. (15, 38)

**Compatible** - Able to get along well with one another. In agreement. (34)

**Conceit** - An exaggerated opinion of oneself. (35-36)

**Condemnation** - State or condition of having been declared guilty; of having received a penalty in response to this declaration of guilt. (21)

**Confess** - Admitting wrong-doing or fault. Telling one's sins to God. (25)

**Consecrate** - Setting apart as holy, or declaring as holy. Devoting

entirely to a certain purpose. (8)

**Consummate** - To complete in every way. To bring to a finish.(49)

**Convert, Converted, Conversion** - Changing from lack of faith to religious belief. Transforming from one form to another. (24)

**Convey** - Making known or communicating words or actions. (17)

**Convict** - Bring to a realization of one's guilt. (15)

**Convulsion** - A violent disturbance. An upheaval-for example, an earthquake. (49)

**Co-operative** - Acts or works together with another in a joint effort. The trinity is co-operative, because each member of the Godhead shares the same will and work. (14)

**Co-powerful** - Has the same power as another. The Trinity is co-powerful, because each member of the Godhead has the same power. (14)

**Corruption** – Evil behavior. Decay and rotteness. Deterioration, or being spoiled, from a state of goodness. (20)

**Covenant**-A binding and solemn agreement made by two parties to do a certain thing. (14)

**Create, Creator** - to cause to come into being. God the Creator forms and gives life. (7)

**Deacon** - Literally, "a servant" of the Church. Responsible mostly for the care of physical needs in the Church; for example, the care of widows, orphans, and other needy persons. (45)

**Degradation** – Lowering or corrupting in value and quality. Bringing into dishonor. (20)

**Deism** - A belief in a God uninvolved with the world after creation. Generally, a belief in the existence of God purely on rational grounds, without appealing to evidence from authority or revelation. (8)

**Deliberate** - Done on purpose. Premeditated. Careful in deciding. Not rash. (29)

**Denomination** - A group of individual congregations (or in the case of the Churches of God, General Conference, state conferences, which themselves are made up of local churches), who are organized by a common beginning, doctrine, and/or government. (All three of these characteristics apply to the Churches of God). (31)

**Discipline** - A training that develops self-control and character, especially in the life of faith and belief. As it applies to the Church, refers especially to a system of rules for the conduct of its members. (31)

**Dispense, Dispensation** - Giving, or dealing out; distributing. "Dispensation" also means an ordering of events under divine authority. (16)

**Elder(s)** – An officer in the Church. In the Churches of God, either a "ruling elder" (selected from the congregation) or a "teaching elder" (normally the pastor). Position of greatest responsibility and authority

in the government of the local congregation. (31)

**Empower** - Giving power or ability to do something. (11)

**Endow** - To provide with some quality. (15)

**Enlighten** - To give the light of truth to, so that the one being enlightened may be free from ignorance, prejudice, and superstition. (11)

**Envoy** - A messenger or agent sent to do a certain task; for example, an ambassador. (46)

**Eradicate, Eradicated** - To uproot; to wipe out or destroy. (29)

**Exalted** - Lifted up; raised in status, dignity, and power. (12)

**Exist, Existed** - To live, to have reality. (1 9)

**Exploit, Exploited** - To take advantage of unfairly, or with bad motives. To extract the value of another for one's own purposes without compensation. (20)

**Faith** - Belief that does not require proof or evidence. Complete reliance or trust. System of religious beliefs. (16)

**Family of God** - An image of the Church, in which it is described as a group of people with ties as close as a family, particularly in its concern for each person in the group and its obedience to God. (14)

**Feet washing** - A ceremony of the Church that is a reenactment of Christ washing the feet of his disciples prior to the Last Supper. Especially symbolic of the Christian life as one of service. An ordinance of the Churches of God. For a fuller treatment of the Churches of God's understanding, see "Feet washing." (35)

**Fellowship** - A group of people with the same interests or goals; a companionship having a mutual sharing of experience. (31)

**Free Moral Agent, Agency** - Able to think and act according to our own will. Free to choose between good and evil, in our everyday life and relationships with others, and with God. See "Free Moral Agency." (22)

**Fundamental** - That which is basic and essential. A "fundamental change" in a person takes place at the very center of being. (33)

**Futile** - Useless, vain, without hope of success. (13)

**Grace** - The completely free and unobligated love and favor of God toward us. Our condition when God is acting within us. Unmerited favor by God. (8)

**History** - What has happened in the life of mankind and nature. Known events that have happened in the past. (8, 48)

**Holy, Holiness** - Belonging to or coming from God. Consecrated, sacred. Spiritually pure, without evil. Sainly. Describes that which is held in deepest reverence. (8)

**Image** - A likeness, or representation of something. A conception or idea that is visualized. (19)

**Immersion** - A plunging completely under water. See "Baptism." (33)

**Immanent**- Present throughout all things (as opposed to away from or

within). Being constantly near. (7)

**Imminent** - About to happen.

**Immortality** – Life that will never be ended by death, lasting forever. (50)

**Impart, Imparted** - To give a share or portion of. "God's imparted work upon a human being" is an internal change in "being" as one receives a portion of God's righteousness. (28, 32)

**Imperishable** - indestructible. That which will not die or decay. (50)

**Impute, imputed** – To credit or assign a quality to someone. "God's imputed work upon a human being" is a change in status before God that is "ascribed" or credited, to a person. (28)

**Incarnation** - The taking on of human form and nature by Jesus Christ. The event of God taking on flesh. (11)

**Indwelling** - That which inhabits or lives in. (15)

**Infallible** - Never wrong. Not able to make a mistake. Completely dependable. (17)

**Inspire, Inspired** - Literally, to breath into. In the case of Scriptures, "God-breathed." To cause, guide, communicate or motivate as by divine influence. (17)

**Instantaneous** - Happening all at once, in a single moment. (28)

**Intercession** - Pleading the case of another. (46)

**Irreverent** - Not giving something its proper respect, especially something that is sacred. (39)

**Judgment** - Determining justice; deciding between what is good or evil, so that the righteous may be vindicated. (50)

**Justice** - The quality and the force of fairness and rightness. (8)

**Justification** – Being freed from blame and guilt. Being shown to be good and honorable. Being made acceptable. (21, 26)

**Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven** - The reign, or rulership of God, active in human life and historic events. Inaugurated by Jesus Christ who saves from sin and the power of evil; will be completed when the new heavens and the new earth are established. (15, 21)

**Laity, Layman, Layperson** - Persons in the Church who are not clergy, that is everyone else besides those who are pastors. (30)

**Last Things** - The events surrounding the end of history and the world as we know it. The study of how God is active in these events is known as "eschatology." See "Last Things." (48)

**Lifestyle** - Way or manner of everyday living. (15)

**Lord** - A person who has great power and authority. Ruler. (12)

**Lord's Supper** - A ceremony of the church in which bread and the fruit of the vine are served to the congregation; these elements are then consumed in response to Christ's commandment in Scripture to do so. An event in the life of Christ which is linked theologically to the Passover and to the sacrificial rite in the Old Testament. An ordinance

of the Churches of God. For a fuller treatment of the meaning of this term in the Churches of God, see "The Lord's Supper." (38)

**Manifestation** - That which is revealed or made plain. (10)

**Manuscript** - Often abbreviated as MS (plural MSS). A document written by hand. (18)

**Memorial** - Anything meant to help people remember an important event, truth, or person. (32)

**Mercy** - Kindness in excess of what may be expected, especially if punishment is deserved. (8)

**Millennium** - In the teachings concerning the "Last Things" the period in which Christ will reign on earth. In one interpretation, Christ will come again to begin this literal, thousand-year reign. In another, the millennium is now present in which Christ reigns by His Word and Spirit. (48)

**Minister, Ministry** - To act for another person; to provide for a person's needs. Traditionally, "minister" has meant "preacher" or "clergyman," however, it is quite clear from Scripture that every Christian is called to "minister." (46)

**Mode** - A way of doing something. A method. (34)

**Mortal** - That which must eventually die. (50)

**New Covenant** - A new set of promises between God and God's people as is set forth in the New Testament and anticipated by the Old Testament. Distinguished from the Old Covenant (see "Old Covenant") by God's Law now being internalized (Jeremiah 31:31-34), as opposed to having to abide by the external laws of the Old Covenant. Moreover, the New Covenant is made possible by God's grace, which was consummated in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and is extended to all believers by the work of the Holy Spirit. (14)

**Old Covenant** - The set of promises between God and God's people throughout the history of Israel as set forth in the Old Testament—especially in the Law given to Moses. (14)

**Omnipotent** - Having unlimited power or authority. (8)

**Omnipresent** - Present in all places at the same time. (8)

**Omniscient** - Having unlimited knowledge. Knowing all things. (8)

**Ordinance, Ordinances** - An authoritative direction or command. A given, regular practice; a religious rite. See the section on "The Ordinances" for a full treatment of the special meaning of this word. (32)

**Partake** - To participate. To eat or drink something. (39)

**Pentecost** - The fiftieth day after Passover. For Christians, the day in which the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ's followers whom he commanded to wait "for the gift my Father promised" (Acts 1:4). The birth of the Church. (14)

**People of God** - A word used for the Church. The Church is the

"people (*laos*) of God," as opposed to the "nations (*ethnai*) of the earth." (30)

**Perish, Perishable** – To be destroyed, or to die. To decay or to deteriorate. (50)

**Pestilence** - Severe diseases, infectious and deadly. (49)

**Pilgrimage** - A long journey or voyage, especially one in which the traveler will never return to the starting place. As a symbol of life, away of living in which everything is judged according to how it relates to the destination, whether it holds back or helps travelers on their way. (21)

**Practice** - The manner of doing something. The doing of something as an application of knowledge. (17)

**Predominant** - Most frequent, noticeable, authoritative. Superior over others. (48)

**Pre-existence** - Having life before something. Refers to the life of Christ before creation. (11)

**Premillennialism** - A major interpretation of "Last Things." See the section on "Last Things" for a fuller treatment. (48)

**Prerequisite** - Something required before-hand. (33)

**Presbyterial** - A system of church government and organization in which the elders (or Presbyters) rule the church. A system where authority is delegated to the elders by the body. (31)

**Progressive** - Moving forward. (28)

**Ransom** - The release of a captive by payment. Specifically, the means by which man is set free from sin; or simply, "redemption." (45)

**Rapture** - A "carrying away" in either body or spirit. In Premillennialism, the removal of the Church from the world prior to the Second Coming. The word "rapture" does not occur in the English Bible; it is rather taken from the Latin word *rapere*, which is used in the Latin Vulgate to translate the Greek word *harpazo* ("caught up") in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. (48)

**Rebuke, Rebuking** - To blame or reprove in a sharp way. (17)

**Reconcile, Reconciliation** - To make friendly again, especially after alienation. To reunite, or bring together again. (20)

**Redeem, Redeemer, Redemption** - To get back or recover what was lost. To set free from sin by making payment or by sacrifice. (11)

**Regeneration** - A spiritual rebirth. Being made new and completely transformed, especially on a spiritual basis. Being reformed, and brought into existence again. See "Regeneration." (24)

**Remission** - Forgiveness or pardon, especially of sin. Release from a debt or penalty. (26)

**Repent, Repentance** - To feel sorry for what one has done or failed to do, so much so that one changes his mind or his ways. (14)

**Reproof** - The act of speaking to in disapproval or rebuke. (10)

**Restoration** – Being brought back to a former state or condition. Being brought back to health and strength. (26)

**Resurrection** - A rising from the dead; a coming back to life. In Scripture, the rising of Jesus from the dead after his crucifixion and burial; and the rising of all the dead on the Last Day. (13)

**Revelation** - A revealing of what was previously unknown. Disclosure of God's nature and will. (9)

**Righteous, Righteousness** - Doing what is right or virtuous. Acting in an upright manner. Morally justifiable. (9)

**Rule** - An authoritative set of regulations; that is, regulations that are meant to be obeyed in conduct and lifestyle. (17)

**Sacrament** - Literally, "an oath of allegiance." The Latin word used to translate the Greek word *mysterion* in the New Testament; thus, it came to mean, in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, any one of the seven rites believed to have been instituted by Jesus and regarded as a means of grace: namely, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist (communion), penance, holy orders, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick. Most Protestant churches have two sacraments: communion and baptism. The Churches of God, rejecting the premise that grace is contained in the act, have "ordinances" instead of sacraments. See "The Ordinances." (32)

**Sacred, Sacredness** – Belonging to God. Regarded with respect and reverence. Much the same as "holy." (19)

**Sanctification** - The act of making, or setting apart, as holy; of purifying, especially of sin. It is "immediate" or "instantaneous" as it applies to the personality, person, or soul. It is gradual as it applies to the "nature," which deals with daily living. (15, 28)

**Savior** - The one who saves. Jesus Christ. (12)

**Second Coming** - A major event in the "Last Things" in which Christ returns again to earth, visibly and undeniably. It is also called the "Second Advent" and, in Greek, the *parousia*. (48)

**Self-Examination** - Looking at one's inner self, searching for unconfessed sins and other important matters of life that have previously been ignored or dismissed. (39)

**Self-imposed** - That which is done or inflicted upon oneself. (12)

**Servant, Servanthood** - One who performs services for others. A Christian servant willingly gives obedience and reverence to another. (35, 45)

**Simultaneous** - Happening or existing at the same time. (26, 28)

**Spiritual** - Of or pertaining to the very deepest nature of life—that part of life in which a person relates to God. (15)

**Spiritual Gifts** - Special abilities or qualities given by the Holy Spirit to each member of the body of Christ, according to God's grace and will, for

use within the Church. (16)

**Spiritual Nurture** - The training and care given to a person's growth in relationship to God. (40)

**Submission** - The act of surrendering to the will of another. The quality of obedience. (16)

**Supernatural** - That which is outside the normal human experience, or is not explainable by human science. (24)

**Supplement** - Add on to. (9)

**Sustain, Sustainer** - To maintain or prolong. To provide for the support of. To continue the life of something. To strengthen. (7)

**Testimony** - A declaration made by a witness, given as evidence. A solemn statement made about something. (12)

**Theism** - Belief in a god. Specifically, belief in the one God who is creator and ruler of the universe and is known through revelation. (8)

**Theology** - A study of the nature of God and of religious truth. See "God." (7, 31)

**Transcendent** - Existing or living beyond what is material or known through the senses. God who is transcendent exists beyond the bounds of human life and experience. (7)

**Transform, Transformation** - To change the form or nature. (18, 24)

**Tribulation** - A major sign announcing Christ's Second Coming. A characteristic of an entire age between Christ's two Comings, there will be a final, climactic Tribulation in which God's people will have to suffer widespread persecution. (48)

**Trinity** - The union of the three divine persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) into one Godhead. This Godhead is a unity—it cannot be divided into three different "gods." (7)

**Vengeance** - The return of injury for injury, retribution. (50)

**Vigilant** - Staying alert and watchful for something to happen. (49)

**Vindicate, Vindication** - To prove right. To defend or clear from suspicion. (51)

**Witness, Witnessing** - A person who can give a first-hand account of an event or a truth. Personal soul-winning, or evangelizing. To testify to or describe one's beliefs about God or one's faith. (15)

**World** - The earth and inhabitants. Secular, rather than spiritual. (24, 45)

**Yield, Yielding** - To give up, surrenders submit, especially because of respect for another's authority or superiority. (29)

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