

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.