

Fall 2026



engage

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

The background of the cover features a photograph of a church event. In the foreground, two women are performing a dance in vibrant orange and red traditional Indian attire with gold belts. Behind them, a group of young people, some wearing blue 'EMPOWERED' t-shirts, are watching the performance. The stage is lit with red spotlights, and a large screen in the background displays the word 'EMPOWERED' in large white letters.

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- An **EMPOWERED** General Assembly
- What Color Is Your God?
- Bring Your Own Shoes
- Church of God Highlights



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Engage Journal is published in the interest of providing contemporary aids and resources to pastors and pastoral staffs.

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On the Cover:

General Assembly delegates participate in the Parade of Nations on Thursday, July 30, 2026.

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From the Editor | Cameron Fisher



Church of God Membership Tops 10 Million

As this issue of *Engage* was close to release, the news broke that for the first time in its history, the Church of God has reported a membership of over 10 million people.

The landmark figure was reported as 10,503,366 around the world. The number originates from several sources compiled through the Business and Records office at the International Offices in Cleveland, Tennessee. It is derived from reports submitted by states and regions, including Canada, and is combined with reports from Church of God World Missions, which corresponds with leaders from the 192 countries in addition to the U.S. and Canada where the Church of God has a presence.

While the 10 million+ membership figure is a significant milestone, it is higher when considering the number of people who attend a Church of God congregation, mission, or house church each week. It does not include numbers from countries where churches meet underground or do not have an organized reporting system. It has been estimated that more than 15 million are actually part of the Church of God.

The statistical report that is released each month gives estimated global membership figures but also includes the number

of churches (50,737 worldwide), credentialed ministers (54,295), Bible schools/colleges/universities (120), and number of students (38,625). It also includes spiritual results: conversions, water baptisms, sermons preached, etc. as reported by ministers each month. While numerical figures for water baptisms and sermons preached can be fairly reliable, personal decisions for Christ only reflect what is known to the reporting minister. Unknown are the thousands – perhaps hundreds of thousands – who have found Christ through watching an online service, an option for believers that has increased exponentially over the last few years as more and more local churches have made “virtual church” a reality, creating a digital community where people can watch live-streamed worship services and connect through chat or video.

Regarding the 10 million announcement, General Overseer Gary Lewis said, “This is a significant milestone for our church and verifies the growth taking place around the globe. We give God the glory for how He has been blessing our movement and recognize that this growth comes from the dedication and commitment of our pastors and laypersons who have a burden for the Harvest.” ■

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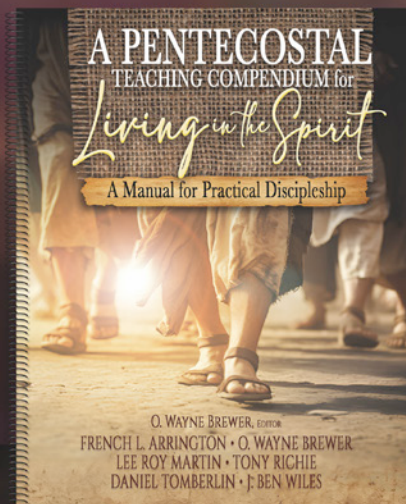
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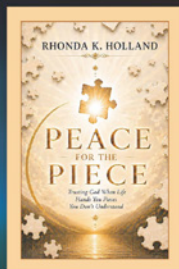
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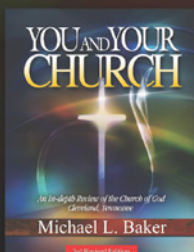
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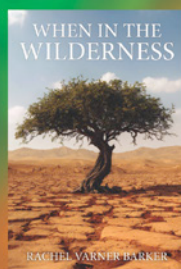
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An EMPOWERED General Assembly

By Gary J. Lewis



(Editor's Note: The following is a personal recap by General Overseer Gary Lewis of the 80th Church of God International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, July 27-30, 2026. The article originally appeared in the fall 2026 edition of the Church of God *Evangel*).

As I write, the 80th General Assembly is barely behind us. Beautiful memories of the incredible moments we shared remain fresh, with the closing days of July still filling the rearview mirror. In the days ahead, the recollections will fade, but the impact of our time in Orlando will be everlasting.

It was an honor to serve for my first time as moderator of the General Council and Assembly. Leading up to the assembly, it was my prayer that God

would meet us in every moment, in the services and the business sessions alike. It is safe to say that He was in the room! My heart was overjoyed as I observed a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the business and in every evening celebration. Empowered was our theme, and when we left Orlando, it was our condition.

General Assembly affords us the opportunity to look back over the biennial period and recognize God's provision. Each morning, I called on my fellow members of the Executive Committee to share what God had done in their divisions. Together, we celebrated 10,000 churches planted, 3 million souls saved, 1.4 million filled with the Spirit,



900 thousand baptized in water, the launching of Project 33, the establishment of the Urban Vision Collective, Men and Women of Action completing 290 projects through 130 thousand hours of volunteer service, 300 families ministered to by Ministerial Care, the establishment of a Ministerial Care Task force, 2,000 CAMS graduates, 1,233 interns completing MIP, 100,000 people reading the word through “We Grow,” 700,000 joining our Global Prayer Gatherings, the establishment of a Global Prayer Force, 200,000 young people attending our camps and gatherings like Winterfest, and \$12 million in Lee



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Along with these reports, we were challenged to carry the Gospel to the masses and fulfill the responsibility of the Church wherever we serve. Each challenge was accentuated with tangible reminders of our calling: a fire starter, Bible, first aid kit, and a baton. All week we were inspired by testimony of God’s goodness and called to Kingdom action. Perhaps the most prominent of those moments was directly following the Council adopting a statement on the



scourge of human trafficking and our obligation to respond. For the Church of God, our statements are more than words; they are a foundation of commitment for righteous action. That day, we announced a task force to lead global ministry efforts in rescuing sons and daughters from bondage. Our ministers were so moved by the Holy Spirit that a spontaneous offering followed the announcement. Within minutes, over 1.5 million dollars was raised, with that total exceeding \$2 million by the next day.

In another historic moment, two sons of Church of God missionary efforts, both born outside the United States -a first for



the Church of God- were elected to lead our World Missions Ministry. I want to offer congratulations to Director Bishop Dr. David Ramirez and Assistant Director Bishop Dr. Ishmael Charles as they step into their new roles. I look forward to working with them and celebrating what God does through their leadership.



General Assembly 2026 gave a multitude of reasons to be grateful and celebrate, many of which there is not space to expound upon here. It was wonderful to worship with thousands of Church of God students as Teen Talent returned to the assembly after 18 years. The dynamic messages shared by our evening speakers Sammy Rodriguez, Christine Caine, and Jentezen Franklin made a lasting impression on our church. On Thursday,



Josue Collins, Caleen Howard, Emmanuel Moodley, Sebastian Schmidgall, and A.J. Velasco brought a unified message through diverse voices, highlighting the future of the Church of God. A powerful anointing rested on every speaker who stepped to the podium as God moved through them to speak to our church.



Whether you are among the thousands who attended in person or the hundreds of thousands who viewed the services, clips, and interviews online, I am sure you felt the same anointing. As General Overseer of this blessed church, I thank God for His favor and look forward with heightened anticipation to what God has in store for us over the next two years. We are the Church of God; We are Empowered! ■

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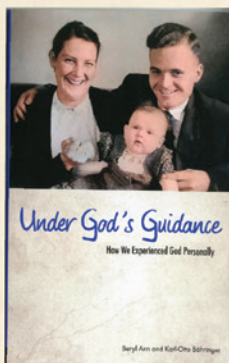
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Bring Your Own Shoes

By Fred Abbott



In over 45 years of ministry, 30 of those in state work, it goes without saying that my wife and I spent many days packing and unpacking as we moved and were appointed to many different positions and locations. We also had the privilege to often follow some very good friends and wonderful leaders.

On one particular appointment, I was following a friend who was quite strong in leadership and always enjoyed a successful ministry. At our very first state meeting in that particular state, I had a gentleman, who served on various state boards come up to me, put his hands on my shoulders, look me in the eye and say “Brother Abbott, you have some big shoes to fill.” I looked back at him, put my hands on his shoulders and stated, “I bring my own shoes.”

We continued to look at each other for a few seconds with our hands on each other’s shoulders and then started laughing. He stated, “I’m sure you have; good for you.” Over the next four years, he became one of my biggest supporters and best friends.

Obviously, what was meant by this dialogue was that I was going to be myself. I have never had an interest in imitating someone else’s ministry or conforming to a mold to “look the part”. (We have enough of those walking around). I have certainly admired many in leadership and have learned from others success and even others’ failures, but I am the most comfortable in being myself and using the unique gifts and personality that God has given me to operate as the part of the Body of Christ that He intended. I Corinthians 12.



Now, when you wear your own shoes, you are going to put yourself out there on the front line and very likely receive some strong looks, some ridicule (especially at first before any victories are won), and doubts from others. For me personally, I knew the shoes I wore were considerably different than anyone I followed or from someone who would follow me. Many lead from a platform, behind a desk and mail outs or through the faces of a board. I was at one youth camp as night speaker and looking for the state director, but the first several people I asked didn't even know who he was. He had been there four years. He had a very successful ministry but obviously served from a distance. That certainly was not me. One of my greatest joys, especially in youth ministry, was being involved and interacting with the youth. I emceed the Teen and Junior Talents, went down water slides, acted absolutely crazy and ridiculous with the youth groups and never felt embarrassed. I've worn blinking bow ties to Sunday morning services because it was a gift from a youth and played an air trumpet with my lips for an offertory. Yeah, you're going to get some strange looks wearing those shoes. As state overseer, I played on a church softball team, wore my uniform and cleats and slid into third base and home every chance I got. "Bishop, we have never had a state overseer play softball with us!" It's just how I was and the shoes I wore.

One of the most obvious stories in the Bible of someone wearing his own shoes and being exactly who God wanted him to be is the story of David and Goliath in I

Samuel 17. As soon as David arrived at the battlefield, bringing food for the troops, he was belittled by his oldest brother Eliab who told him he was nothing more than a small-time shepherd and part time Door Dash driver. This certainly wasn't the first time he had been belittled by big brother as David's response was "What have I done this time?!" David's shoes didn't quite meet the standards of Eliab, but David was not discouraged. He wore his own shoes.

King Saul was certain that the only way for David to face Goliath was to imitate himself. And why not? He was a tall, handsome leader with a proven track record of many successful victories. Just be like me! Take my armor! But it became immediately clear that what worked for Saul in the past would not work for David. He wore his own shoes.

So, there goes David, marching across the valley, with nothing but a sling and a few stones. Heading toward this giant gladiator dressed in full body armor. I'm sure big brother was watching and anticipating a family embarrassment. King Saul was likely scratching his head trying to think of his next move. As both armies looked on from opposite sides, this had to be a most amusing sight. Goliath looked at David in contempt. He was offended that this was who the Israelites sent out. "This is the best you got?!" But David knew the battle was the Lord's. He remembered all the past victories out on a field full of sheep.

Let me stop here and say this. A new appointment or position can be intimidating. Every time I walked in that new office,



doubts and insecurity would try to sneak into my mind. “I can’t follow this person.” “I’m way different than what they are used to...I’m not qualified.” When that happens, do what David did and reflect on the great victories God has given you. Remember that the battle is the Lord’s. You’re the one God has placed in that position. He moved the other person out to make room for you.

Well, we know what happened between David and Goliath. David was secure in who he was with the Lord. He wasn’t intimidated by big brother’s belittling. He refused to imitate King Saul, and he wasn’t backing down to Goliath. He stayed true to who he was in the Lord. He trusted the Lord. David looked foolish, ill equipped,

unqualified for a short time, but with that victory, everything changed. No one ever looked at David the same way again. He was to become King David. A man after God’s own heart.

Be what God has called you to be. Wear your own shoes. ■

Fred A. Abbott has been involved in ministry for over 45 years serving as youth pastor, senior pastor, and 30 years in state work as State Youth Director and State Overseer. He resides in Cleveland, Tennessee, with his wife Vicki enjoying spending time with his children and grandchildren. He continues to travel and speak and perform at special events with his recordings of love songs on his YouTube channel. (Fred A. Abbott)



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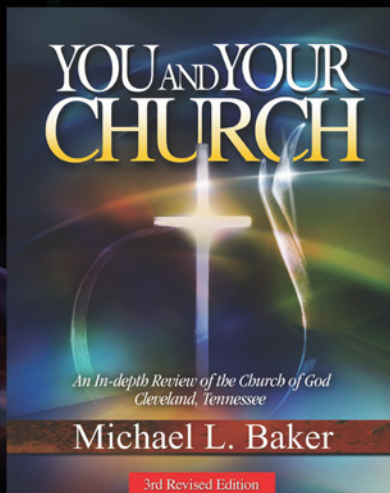
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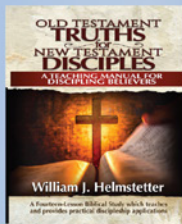


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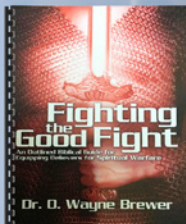
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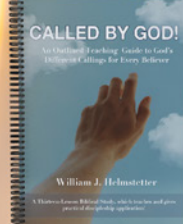
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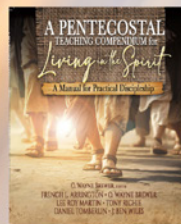
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What Color Is Your God?

By Fijoy Johnson

Across the United States and around the world, tensions rooted in race, culture, politics, nationalism, and identity remain deeply visible. Communities are fractured by fear, misunderstanding, and competing narratives of belonging. Public discourse is often marked by polarization rather than listening, and institutions that once served as moral guides now struggle to hold public trust. In the midst of this reality, the church stands at a critical crossroads. Rather than mirroring the divisions of the world, the church is called to set a higher standard, modeling a kingdom shaped not by fear or dominance, but by reconciliation, humility, and mutual belonging (Matthew 5:14–16; John 17:21). The stakes are not merely social. They are profoundly theological. How the church embodies unity amid difference reveals what and whom it truly believes God to be.

David D. Ireland's *What Color Is Your God? A New Approach to Developing a Multicultural Lifestyle* confronts the reader with a question that is deceptively simple yet spiritually disruptive. It is not a question about God's essence but about our assumptions, assumptions shaped by culture, power, history, and habit. Ireland presses the church to reckon honestly with whether the God we worship has been reduced, localized, or subtly reimaged



through cultural dominance rather than revealed fully through Scripture and the Spirit (Genesis 1:27; John 4:24).

At the heart of the book is a prophetic conviction that the church cannot fully reflect God unless it learns to live beyond cultural isolation. Ireland insists that Christianity was never meant to be monocultural, even when it claims theological orthodoxy or numerical growth (Genesis 12:3; Revelation 7:9).

A Question Born in the Ordinary

Ireland famously traces the book's genesis to a mundane moment in a grocery store, one of the few American spaces where diversity regularly gathers without explanation or apology. He notices



people of different races, languages, and backgrounds sharing aisles, goals, and proximity. That moment leads to a piercing spiritual question placed on his heart, “Why can’t it be like this in My church?” (John 17:21).

This question becomes the lens through which the entire book operates. Ireland is not simply lamenting segregation. He is exposing a disconnect between God’s kingdom vision and church practice. While churches preach unity, their lived experience often betrays separation (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Ireland later summarizes the problem succinctly, noting that believers can be Christ centered in language yet culturally exclusive in lifestyle. That subtle contradiction, he argues, is deeply spiritual, not merely sociological (James 2:1; Matthew 7:16).

When Culture Quietly Becomes Theology

One of Ireland’s most important contributions is his insistence that culture shapes theology more than most Christians realize. Churches often assume their worship styles, leadership norms, preaching patterns, and definitions of maturity are purely biblical. Ireland challenges that assumption directly (Romans 12:2).

He observes that believers frequently confuse their way of following Christ with the way of following Christ. God is

not bound to a single cultural expression, yet churches often act as though He were (Acts 10:34–35). The danger lies in mistaking familiarity for faithfulness (Isaiah 29:13).

In one striking phrase, Ireland reminds readers that “God is colorless, but His people are not.” The tension lies not in acknowledging difference, but in refusing to engage it (Acts 2:5–11).

Ireland presses further, arguing that when one culture dominates the church unquestioned, it begins to function as a theological filter. Other cultural expressions are subtly labeled as emotional, unorthodox, or disruptive, while the dominant expression remains invisible and unnamed (1 Corinthians 12:21–22).

The Limits of Colorblind Faith

Ireland directly confronts the popular Christian language of colorblindness. While often rooted in a desire for harmony, he warns that colorblind faith can become spiritually evasive. Ignoring difference does not erase injustice. It often protects it (Proverbs 28:13).

He cautions that unity without acknowledgment of pain leads to shallow reconciliation. As Ireland writes, “You cannot heal what you refuse to see.” When churches avoid conversations about race, they are not preserving peace. They are postponing transformation (Ephesians 2:14–16).



Ireland insists that biblical reconciliation requires truth telling. Scripture never bypasses suffering on the way to unity. Repentance, confession, and justice precede restoration (Psalm 51:6; Micah 6:8). The cross itself is God's refusal to ignore the depth of human brokenness (Isaiah 53:5).

A Kingdom Bigger Than Our Comfort Zones

Central to *What Color Is Your God?* is a vision of the kingdom of God as inherently multicultural. This is not a future ideal limited to heaven but a present calling for the church (Matthew 28:19).

Ireland repeatedly returns to the New Testament vision of every tribe, every people, and every language. He emphasizes that this diversity is not accidental. It is essential to God's self-revelation (Revelation 7:9).

At one point, Ireland describes the multicultural church as a reflection of eternity breaking into time. Churches that resist diversity are not merely resisting change. They are resisting preparation for God's promised future (Hebrews 12:28).

He summarizes the challenge clearly, "If the kingdom is diverse, the church must be diverse" (Colossians 3:11).

Multiculturalism as a Lifestyle, not a Program

One of the book's most widely cited assertions is Ireland's insistence that

"multicultural ministry is not a program. It is a lifestyle." This distinction is crucial. Ireland critiques churches that attempt to address diversity through isolated events while leaving leadership, decision making, and power structures untouched (Luke 6:46).

For Ireland, multicultural faith reshapes everything. It reshapes how sermons are illustrated, who holds authority, how conflict is handled, and whose stories are centralized (1 Corinthians 12:4–7).

He warns that without lifestyle change, diversity initiatives become cosmetic. True multicultural living requires believers to relinquish control, not just share space (Philippians 2:3–4).

The Cost of Crossing Cultures

Ireland is careful not to romanticize the multicultural journey. Unity across difference is costly. It exposes blind spots, disrupts comfort, and demands humility (Luke 9:23).

He writes plainly that "comfort is the greatest enemy of reconciliation." Many Christians affirm diversity in principle but resist it in practice because it unsettles familiar rhythms (John 12:25).

Ireland reframes discomfort as discipleship. Following Christ has always meant crossing boundaries, ethnic, social, and spiritual (John 4:9). Avoiding that cost reshapes Jesus into a culturally safe figure rather than the boundary crossing



Savior revealed in the Gospels (Philippians 2:7).

Leadership, Power, and Shared Authority

A particularly challenging section of the book focuses on leadership. Ireland insists that a multicultural congregation without multicultural leadership remains incomplete. Representation in worship does not equal representation in influence (Acts 6:1–6).

He asks difficult questions. Who casts vision? Who interprets Scripture publicly? Who decides what matters? (Proverbs 11:14).

Ireland argues that the Holy Spirit does not speak through a single culture alone. When leadership remains homogeneous, the church unintentionally communicates that some voices matter more than others (1 Corinthians 12:12–14).

He warns against tokenism and insists on shared authority, noting that unity without shared power is fragile and temporary (Galatians 5:13).

From the Sanctuary to the Street

Ireland extends the implications of multicultural faith far beyond Sunday worship. He frames it as a daily posture that affects neighborhoods, friendships, workplaces, and civic engagement (Colossians 3:17).

The church, he argues, is called not merely to reflect society but to model a re-deemed version of it (Matthew 5:14–16). When believers learn to honor difference within the body of Christ, they gain credibility as agents of reconciliation in a divided world (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Ireland notes that the gospel becomes believable when it is visible, when unity is practiced rather than merely proclaimed (James 1:22).

A Prophetic Word That Still Speaks

More than twenty years after its publication, *What Color Is Your God?* remains unsettlingly relevant. Ireland does not offer easy answers or quick formulas. Instead, he offers a question that refuses to disappear (Hebrews 4:12).

The book ultimately leads readers back to self-examination. Have we made God too small? Have we mistaken familiarity for faithfulness? Have we limited the kingdom by our comfort? (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Ireland's closing challenge is implicit but unmistakable. The color of our God is revealed in the color of our obedience (John 14:15). ■

Fijoy L. Johnson, D.Min. Serves as Director of Intercultural Ministries for the Church of God and Director of Community & Church Relations at Lee University.



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VOL 1	VOL 2	VOL 3	
<u>January</u>	<u>February</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>
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(Chapter 6 - 7 from "Fighting The Good Fight")	DISCIPULING PENTECOSTALS SERIES: 200	DISCIPULING PENTECOSTALS SERIES: 200	DISCIPULING PENTECOSTALS SERIES: 200
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<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
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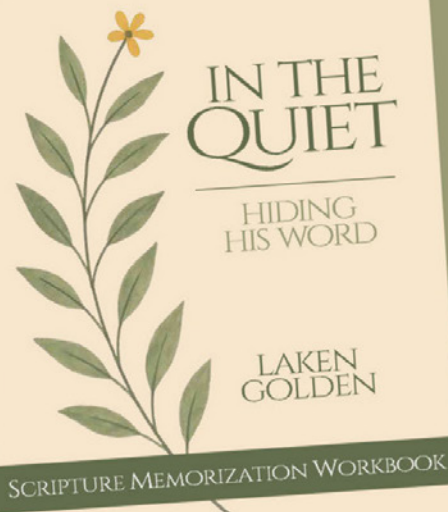


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MONEY MATTERS

ART RHODES

Failure to Pay “941 Taxes”

If a church has filed a quarterly Form 941 but has not paid the employment taxes due or has neither filed the Form 941 nor paid the 941 taxes, it is in a risky position, simply because the IRS treats payroll taxes very seriously. Unlike income tax, payroll tax withholdings (federal income taxes, Social Security taxes, and Medicare taxes) are considered “trust fund” money—funds withheld from employees’ paychecks that must be remitted to the IRS. Failure to pay these taxes can lead to heavy penalties, interest, and even personal liability for responsible persons under the IRS Trust Fund Recovery Penalty (TFRP).

To limit liability, the church should take the following steps at a minimum:

1. Act Immediately

- Do not delay. Interest and penalties continue to accrue until payment arrangements are made and taxes are paid.
- The IRS is far less lenient with unpaid payroll taxes than even with personal income taxes.

2. Verify Amounts Owed

- Review all past 941 filings, or complete 941s for quarters in which such were not filed, to confirm the amount of employment payroll taxes due.

- If 941s were filed but no taxes were paid, request an IRS account transcript to see how much is outstanding, including penalties and interest.

3. Correct Mistakes (If Any)

- If the church miscalculated and reported more than was truly owed – or did not accurately report what was paid, it may be possible to file Form 941-X to adjust prior returns.

4. Pay What You Can Immediately

- Even partial payments towards 941 tax liability reduce interest and penalties.
- The IRS generally applies payments to the tax liability first, but, if possible, you should designate payments specifically to “trust fund” amounts.

5. Work with the IRS

- Contact the IRS to discuss options:
 - Installment Agreement – allows the church to pay the amount owed over time.
 - Offer in Compromise – if the church cannot realistically pay all liabilities (harder for payroll taxes, but possible) in a reasonable period of time through installment payments, you can make an “offer in compromise” to the IRS to settle for a lesser amount



immediately. Your offer may not be accepted, but it is always worth trying.

- Do not ignore IRS notices—ignoring notices increases the risk of personal levies, liens, or other enforcement.

6. Understand Leadership Liability

- Church board members, pastors, and officers may be held personally liable if they are “responsible persons” who willfully failed to remit payroll taxes.
- This means that church board members, pastors, and officer’s personal assets and bank accounts could be frozen or taken to satisfy church liabilities under the Trust Fund Recovery Penalty.
- It is critical that the church’s governing body understands this massive personal exposure and makes sure that all tax liabilities are paid promptly.

7. Engage Professional Help

- Hire a CPA, IRS Enrolled Agent, or Tax Attorney with payroll tax resolution experience to help navigate your payroll tax issues.
- These experts can represent the church before the IRS and negotiate on your behalf.

8. Put Safeguards in Place

- Ensure payroll withholding taxes are deposited timely going forward (usually via EFTPS).
- If you only have a volunteer church treasurer and they are not knowledgeable about payroll tax issues,

consider outsourcing payroll to a reputable payroll service to prevent future lapses.

- Have the church board adopt clear financial oversight policies.

Summary:

The church should immediately engage a tax professional, pay as much as possible now, and contact the IRS to arrange resolution of any outstanding payroll tax issues. Ignoring the issue is the worst option, as both the church and its leadership may face severe financial and legal consequences. A pastor or board members’ personal bank accounts can be seized by the IRS to pay the payroll taxes of the church if notices and demands are ignored. Because of the severity of the actions that can be taken by the IRS, the church leadership should always be diligent in making sure that payroll taxes are paid completely and timely.

Finally, remember that if you only have ministers on your payroll AND you are not doing voluntary federal income tax withholdings on the ministers, you should **not** be filing a quarterly Form 941. ■

Art Rhodes

President and CEO

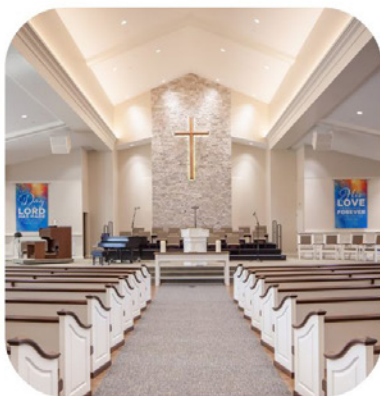
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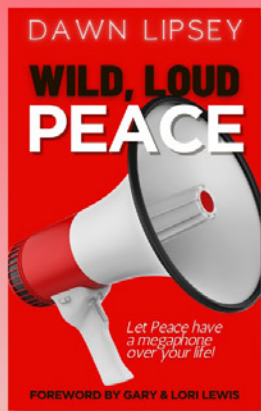
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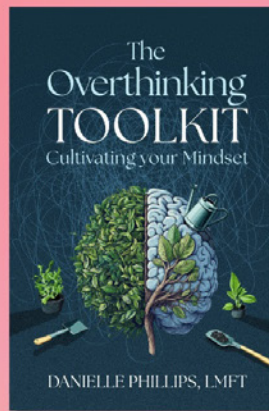
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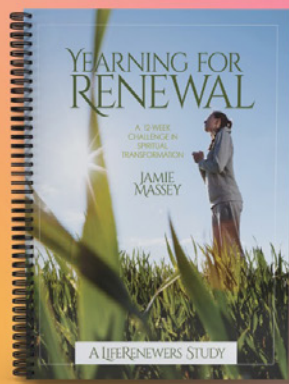
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**LEGAL NOTES**

TRAVIS D. HENRY

Who Owns the Church Building?



A church building is more than real estate. It is often acquired, improved, and maintained through the sacrifices of members who gave with the understanding that the property would support the doctrine, ministry, and mission of the denomination. But how can a congregation ensure that its building and surrounding property remain committed to those principles from generation to generation?

In a day when church buildings take many forms—from a traditional brick

building with a steeple to a converted shopping center—it is critical that church property remain committed to its original purpose and denominational alignment as it is passed from one generation to the next. One mechanism in our denomination providing such protection is fondly called the “Church of God Warranty Deed.” This document is, in essence, a declaration and covenant contained in the vesting deed for the church property. It states that the local board of trustees, rather than a single pastor, has the sole right,



power, and authority to sell, exchange, convey, or pledge the church property. Perhaps even more significantly, it contains a restrictive covenant providing that, if the local congregation ceases to function or exist, or acts contrary to Church of God policy, the State Board of Trustees ultimately holds authority and control over the church's real property.

These restrictions also help avoid conflict. Without clear deed language, disputes may arise among remaining members, former leaders, creditors, or outside organizations over who controls the property. The language recommended in the Church of God Warranty Deed provides guidance in advance and reduces uncertainty during what may already be a difficult time for the congregation.

At its core, these restrictions are a matter of stewardship and of honoring the sacrifices made by members, including generations before us. That stewardship also builds confidence, credibility, and accountability, encouraging a congregation to give with greater trust. Now is a good time to confirm whether your local church property deed contains these covenants and restrictions. ■

***Travis D. Henry** is a licensed real estate attorney in Cleveland, Tennessee and acts as general counsel to the Tennessee Church of God State Office, as well as Lee University. He is a member of North Cleveland Church of God and serves as Chairman of its Finance Committee.*



Church of God Legal Counsel
Dennis Watkins was honored at the recent International General Assembly. Watkins announced his retirement earlier this year after 32 years of service at the International Offices. Dr. Watkins has also been author of *Legal Notes* since the inception of *Engage* in 2009.

Thank you, and congratulations, Dennis Watkins!



Dennis Watkins, left, is congratulated by General Overseer Gary Lewis

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Church of God HIGHLIGHTS

Abbreviated items of interest to the Church of God published on Faith News Network between May 15, 2026, and September 1, 2026. To read the articles in their entirety and others, please visit faithnews.cc.

Korean Church Organization Partners with Church of God

May 18, 2026 – Cleveland, TN—

The Church of God, headquartered in Cleveland, Tennessee, and Yonsei Central Church/ The Association of Christian Mission Churches (ACMC) in Korea, signed an agreement entering into a strategic and missional affiliation of ministries. The agreement, formally signed on May 14, 2026, at the Church of God International Offices, outlines strategies of global evangelization and “any and all relevant efforts pertaining to the process of equipping and training the workers for the harvest.”

The ceremony was held in the Global Prayer Center with distinguished guests from the Church of God including General Overseer Gary Lewis, assistant general overseers Tony Stewart, Wayne Dority, and Mark Williams, and Secretary General Tom Madden. General Director M. Thomas Propes and Assistant Director David Ramirez represented Church of God World Missions. Among Korean dignitaries in attendance was Dr. Yu Kunjae, president of Juan International University. Bishop Yoon Seok-Jeon is the Founding and Senior Pastor of the Yonsei Central Church and Board Chair of the ACMC, which represents over 1,800 churches in Korea. Due to health concerns, Pastor Yoon was represented by



*L-R: David Han, Wayne Dority, Tony Stewart,
Gary Lewis, Soon-Won Seo, Yu Kunjae,
Tom Madden, Mark Williams*

his Chief Secretary Soon-Won Seo who joined General Overseer Lewis at the formal signing.

The scope and the terms of the affiliation include, but are not limited to:

- The Church of God (COG) and Yonsei Central Church-The Association of Christian Mission Churches (YCC-ACMC) enter into the relationship to pursue, promote, and partner together in the work of global evangelization;
- COG and YCC-ACMC explore creative and ongoing opportunities in educational collaboration that help train and equip the present and future workers for the harvest, nurturing the shared vision of saving souls everywhere;



- Through the administrative leadership of Church of God Division of Education, COG provides an ecclesial support as YCC-ACMC pursues and implements educational collaboration with the Church of God accredited institutions (e.g., Lee University);
- Following the ecclesial bylaws, policies, and procedures in both organizations, COG and YCC-ACMC explore possibilities of credentialing the members of YCC-ACMC who successfully complete the designated educational program (i.e., Master of Divinity program) of the Church of God accredited institution. To qualify for the COG ministerial credentialing, the candidates under this provision must also successfully complete the ordination exams conducted by the Church of God;
- To cultivate and deepen the relationship of affiliation, COG and YCC-ACMC commit to providing opportunities for leadership, visits to each other's significant official gatherings (e.g., The ACMC's Annual Assembly, COG Executive Council Meeting, COG biennial General Assembly, etc.).

“The signing of this affiliation agreement presents enormous possibilities that would help expand the global missionary vision of the Church of God,” stated Dr. David Han, national overseer for the Church of God in Korea who participated in the ceremony and helped facilitate the

partnership. “It strengthens our unwavering commitment to saving souls around the world.” Han went on to say that the memorandum, “strategically prioritizes a mutual support and collaboration in accredited theological education and certified ministerial training.”

“This signing is a momentous occasion and demonstrates the ongoing global reach of the Church of God,” Lewis said. “I am grateful for the leaders of the Association of Christian Mission Churches in Korea and what this partnership means as the Church of God celebrates 140 years as a movement.” ■

Historical Commission Announces Conn Historical Writing Award Winners

May 18, 2026 – Cleveland, TN—The Church of God Historical Commission recently announced winners of the 2024-2026 Charles W. Conn Historical Writing Awards. The recipients are Karl-Otto Bohringer of Germany and Phyllis Thompson of the United Kingdom.

The Historical Commission selects both a book and an article each General Assembly period to receive the writing award and to encourage the writing and publication of books and articles related to the history and heritage of the Church of God.

Bohringer was recognized with the Charles W. Conn Historical Book Award. Bohringer is the author of *Under God's Guidance*. An ordained bishop in the



Church of God, the biography covers the years 1930 to 1960 and ends with pastorate in Emmendingen, Germany, and Colmar/Munster, France. Bohringer is a retired professor who for more than 60 years served as evangelist, pastor, church planter, radio minister, regional overseer, editor, and music professor. He is the author of several books, the most recent is *Powerful Prayer*. His wife, Beryl Ann (who assisted in the writing), was a schoolteacher born in Leicester, England. She passed away in 2019. Karl and his current wife, Christa, live in Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

Rev. Phyllis Thompson is the winner of the Charles W. Conn Historical Writing Article Award. Her winning entry is entitled, *The New Testament Church of God Heritage Centre (UK): Site of Remembering: Sharing Our Stories and the Impact on Our Institutional Memory*. Thompson has a background in development education and pastoral ministry in the United Kingdom. She has served as a member of the Church of God International General Board of Education, the Historical Commission, an Executive Council member of the European Pentecostal Theological Association, and a member of the leadership of her church in Northampton. She has written on topics to do with Black majority churches and women Christian leadership. Recent publications include her contribution to *Faith of Our Fathers* (Pathway Press, 2009), *Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the 21st Century* (SPCK, 2013), and *Challenges of Pentecostal Theology in the 21st Century* (SPCK, 2020), the latter two of which she is editor.

The Church of God International Executive Council created the Charles W. Conn Historical Writing Award in 2002 to honor the long-time Church of God author and historian. Conn penned his history of the Church of God in 1955. When *Like A Mighty Army* was revised in 1972, the Executive Council designated Conn as Church Historian. Pathway Press released a tribute edition in 2008.

For 2024-2026, Dr. James E. Cossey served as chair of the Historical Commission and Assistant General Overseer Tony Stewart as the International Executive Committee liaison. The Writing Award subcommittee consisted of Dr. Douglas LeRoy, chairman; Rev. Lance Colkmire, and Dr. David G. Roebuck. ■

General Council Fights Human Trafficking

July 30, 2026 – Orlando, FL—What began as Item No. 9 on the General Council Agenda at the Church of God International General Assembly became a million-dollar moment.

The International General Council of the Church of God, meeting this week in Orlando, Florida, unanimously passed an anti-trafficking statement during Thursday's business session. Then, in a spontaneous move of God, Presiding Bishop Dr. Gary Lewis challenged the body of Ordained Bishops to raise \$1 million to resource the fight against human trafficking – but they did not stop there.



Within the hour, more than \$1.5 million in gifts and pledges came in as thousands of attendees lifted their hands in prayer and commitment. Dr. Lewis then pledged to appoint a task force to lead what will become a global ministry to rescue sons and daughters from human trafficking in every form. Commitments continued to pour in later that day bringing the unofficial amount to over \$2 million.

“I want what we do to be significant,” Dr. Lewis said. “It’s got to be more than words that go in a book. It’s got to be action by our church, where we drive a stake in the ground and say we are going to make a difference in the lives of children who have been exploited and abused.”

“We are going to do everything to stand in the gap and make a difference,” Lewis said.

This will not just make this an action item at the international level. Lewis also asked every state and region to appoint a leader or director to head the anti-trafficking effort at the local level, and for every pastor and church to do the same – creating a team at every level of ministry in the Church of God.

The agenda item itself, which passed with no opposition, affirmed that the Church of God “must actively oppose all forms of trafficking and exploitation through prayer, education, prevention and restoration.” Thanks to Thursday’s unannounced offering, those efforts will begin with a powerful head start on funding.

In other action, the International General Council passed two additional agenda items.

The body voted to modify Exhorter Licensure, renaming it “Licensed Minister.” Under this new title, the rank will be granted for a two-year period where the candidate will serve in a chosen area of ministry specialization.



During the General Assembly in July, General Overseer Lewis joins the General Council in a spontaneous prayer for victims of human trafficking

The license can be maintained by renewal, with qualifiers involving training in the minister’s area of specialization.

An agenda item was also passed to include the option of online monthly reporting for ministers and spell out exemptions to monthly reporting. The General Council headed into Friday’s final session continuing deliberation on Item No. 10 dealing with the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence.

The 80th General Assembly concludes on Friday with a final morning session of the General Council, followed by the General Assembly on Friday afternoon. A final evening service begins at 6:00 pm featuring a message by Dr. Jentezen Franklin of



Gainesville, GA. The service will be followed by a Teen Talent Awards Festival, the first to be held at a General Assembly since 2008. ■

Church of God Celebrates 140th Anniversary

August 19, 2026 – Cleveland, TN—

Today, Wednesday, August 19, 2026, the Church of God celebrates its 140th birthday. This day marks the anniversary of a small group of people responding to the call of a twenty-nine-year-old preacher by the name of R.G. Spurling. In a mill house along Barney Creek in Monroe County, Tennessee, they formed a congregation called “Christian Union,” which is considered to be the birth of the Church of God.

According to Dr. David G. Roebuck, Church of God Historian, Spurling’s action arose from years of hindrance from local Baptist churches. In his experience, they had replaced the New Testament and the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor with creeds and traditions.

Roebuck tells of the activities of that day, August 19, 1886: “Our earliest account reports that the meeting opened with singing and prayer, and then Spurling delivered ‘a strong discourse, emphasizing the need for a reformation.’ We are told, ‘The arguments were full of force and proved effective, and were endorsed by the hearers, so that when the time came for action there was free and earnest response.’”

Following his sermon, Roebuck states that R.G. Spurling, “made a plea to take the New Testament as our only rule of faith and

practice and to sit together as the Church of God.” Eight responded to Spurling’s appeal. Then with assistance from his father, Richard Spurling, who was an ordained minister, they set in order a congregation, which they called Christian Union.



With no existing photograph of the Barney Creek Meeting (Mill) House, which was destroyed about 1912, this sketch is a rendition of mills in the area as described to artist James Marshall.

“Indebted to the vision of R.G. Spurling, we have expanded from the mountain congregations he planted to a global Christian movement of almost 10 million members in 194 countries and territories of the world,” Roebuck continued. “The Church of God has embraced holiness and Pentecostal experience and theology, while still affirming the New Testament is our ‘only rule of faith and practice.’”

R.G. Spurling’s son, G.P. Spurling, later remembered, “After the organization of the church in 1886, father furnished his own lumber and built a small church house. People would fill this church every meeting and pray. And how God would bless and save!” One hundred and forty years later, we rejoice that God is still blessing and saving through the global ministries of the Church of God. ■

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"With all boldness, Christ will be magnified through me." – Philippians 1:20

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Cleveland, TN



Oh, **magnify** the Lord
with me, and let us exalt
His name together.
-Psalm 34:3

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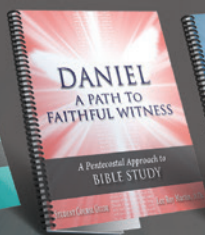
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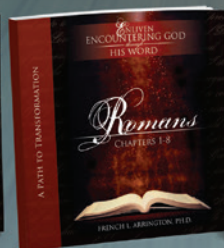
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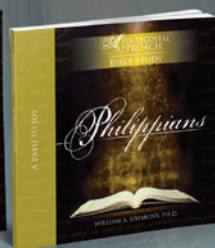
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