

“Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God

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Introduction

“As many Christians as are here present that are desirous to be free from all men made [*sic*] creeds and traditions, and are willing to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, for your only rule of faith and practice; giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and are willing to set [*sic*] together as the Church of God to transact business [as] the same, come forward.”¹

With this invitation, a small band of believers formed the Christian Union on the banks of Barney Creek in Monroe County, Tennessee, on August 19, 1886. We know little about their activities, but the passion of those nine people who covenanted together probably rivaled the heat of a typical blistering summer day in the Unicoi Mountains in eastern Tennessee, which they called home. Although they left few records, their efforts led to the growth of a denomination that approaches the end of the twentieth century with 4,648,000 members and 26,416 churches in 139 countries around the world.²

To this day Barney Creek remains a small stream that flows gently through the mountains. Lush vegetation reveals the abundance of life in this locale. A recently paved road belies the difficulty of travel that existed long after comfortable transportation was common place in most of North America. Yet, even the casual observer notes the difficulty of livelihood that continues to exist for people in this part of the Appalachian Mountains. In this unexpected region of the country, people hungry for the restoration of New Testament Christianity sought God and came together to be the “church of God.” Out of their vision of Christian union, with the later addition of the experiences of sanctification and Spirit baptism, as well as a desire for world harvest, came the “Church of God” as we know it today.

A Call for Reformation

The vision for Christian union rose up in the heart of R. G. Spurling (1857-1935) and his father Richard Spurling (1810-1891). R. G. Spurling had been a licensed minister in the Missionary Baptist church. Along with his father, an ordained elder, he began to seek God regarding abuses that he saw in the local churches around him. According to the earliest chronicler of these events, Spurling became disturbed about certain traditions and creeds that he considered a hardship for God’s people. He saw a need for further reformation of the church beyond the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century. While Luther, Calvin and other reformers had brought about important changes, their legacy focused on right belief rather than on a right relationship with Jesus Christ and on assent to doctrine rather than love for one another. Creeds became more important than the leading of the Holy Spirit and one’s own conscience.³

Spurling and his father were particularly troubled with Landmarkism that had dominated Baptist life in the South from the middle part of the nineteenth century. Coined by James Madison Pendleton and advocated by James Robinson Graves, editor of *The Tennessee Baptist*, the term “Landmark” came from Proverbs 22:28, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” Pendleton and Graves taught that Baptists were putting aside a significant landmark when they worshipped with non-Baptists. Landmarkism held to a line of Baptist succession from the time of Christ, the importance of believer’s baptism by a Baptist minister and the exclusivity of Baptist churches.

For Spurling, the focus of Christianity was on the law of love rather than any creed or doctrine, which might be used to divide Christians. Where believers practice Christ’s command to love God and neighbor, a testimony of faith in Christ is sufficient for unity with one another. The New Testament is the only “infallible rule of faith and practice” and contains everything “necessary for salvation and church government.” As long as something is not contrary to the New Testament, Christians should give one another “equal rights and privileges to read, believe and practice for themselves in all matters of religion . . .”⁴

Spurling was of course part of the broad restorationist current that swept through the United States of America during the nineteenth century. The Christian Union, much like other groups such as the Churches of Christ and Churches of God (Anderson, Indiana) wanted to restore New Testament Christianity. These groups emphasized different aspects of the New Testament, but all wanted to restore some part of the Apostolic church. Some focused on government, some on lifestyle, some on the message, but all wanted to restore to contemporary Christian life something that they believed had been lost in the intervening centuries. For Spurling, union based on love rather than creeds was the critical aspect of Christian life that had been lost. He saw in the teachings of Landmarkism a harshness and exclusivity that stifled the gospel and led to dividing the body of Christ rather than to Christian unity.

Spurling’s vision to restore the law of love and individual conscience to Christianity began to bear fruit on August 19, 1886. For two years he had prayed along with his father and John Plemons for reformation. After being barred from his own Baptist church, and seeing little hope of any change in the existing churches, Spurling met with others of like mind in the Barney Creek meeting house. An invitation was given and nine people covenanted with each other in Christian Union. As an ordained bishop, his father Richard Spurling moderated the proceedings. But the small congregation selected R. G. Spurling as pastor and ordained him the following month.

Very little is known about the Christian Union and the ministry of R. G. Spurling following the formation of Christian Union. A. J. Tomlinson, who knew Spurling well in later years, wrote that he preached wherever he had an opportunity and

[i]n this way the minds of the people were continually agitated, and gradually prepared for the work of the Spirit that was to follow. For ten years this

servant of God prayed, wept and continued his ministry against much opposition and under peculiar difficulties, before seeing much fruits of his labor.⁵

Charles W. Conn wrote that Spurling focused on the new birth and described his preaching as “largely denunciatory, like the prophets of Israel, in which impediments in the churches were defined and repudiated.”⁶

A biographical sketch by his son, G. P. Spurling, revealed that between 1889 and 1895 Spurling organized three other congregations that went by the name Christian Union, one of which still survives today as an independent congregation.⁷ With his roots firmly planted in the soil of his Baptist heritage, it is likely that Spurling was content for these congregations to function independently with Baptist polity but within the spirit of Christian Union.

A Revival of Holiness

Spurling’s long-sought reformation of the churches in that region came not through his own direct ministry but as a result of a revival in nearby Cherokee County, North Carolina. Since the 1830s a growing cry for holiness and sanctification was heard in North America, especially among followers of John Wesley and his doctrine of Christian perfection. Wesley had taught that all Christians should be going on to perfection and that before one could see God, one’s heart must be perfected—that is, so full of the love of God that there was no room for sin toward God or neighbor. Although Wesley understood that for many people this happened near the time of death, he believed that God could “cut short” the time and sanctify seekers earlier in life. Indeed, this was what Wesley believed God wanted to do through the burgeoning Methodism he nurtured.

Timothy Merritt, Phoebe Palmer and others took up the call to holiness with varying emphases and promoted Wesley’s doctrine in the United States. They differed from Wesley in that they particularly emphasized the instantaneous aspects of sanctification, the importance of testimony and the outward fruit of the sanctified life. Following the Civil War tensions between proponents and opponents of the developing Holiness movement led to the creation of new denominations that taught entire sanctification. Many in the Holiness movement also accentuated the work of the Holy Spirit, sometimes equating the sanctification experience with the Acts 2 account of the day of Pentecost.

Among these holiness proponents, Benjamin Hardin Irwin took a more radical approach to the Christian life and taught a “third blessing” called “the fire.” Beginning in Iowa in 1895, he organized Fire-Baptized Holiness Associations around the United States. The next year he preached in South Carolina and Georgia. By 1898 he had organized an international Fire-Baptized Holiness Association in Anderson, South Carolina, and was publishing a periodical called *Live Coals of Fire*. His message was

influential in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina where Spurling was ministering.

In 1896, four men influenced by Irwin's movement began a revival in the Shearer Schoolhouse near Camp Creek in Cherokee County, North Carolina. William Martin, a Methodist, along with Baptists Joe M. Tipton, Elias Milton McNabb and William Hamby, preached a ten day meeting that attracted a great deal of attention in the area. According to Tomlinson, "They preached a clean gospel, and urged the people to seek and obtain sanctification subsequent to justification. They prayed, fasted and wept before the Lord until a great revival was the result."⁸

William F. Bryant (1863-1949), a Baptist deacon, became part of the Holiness movement and began holding Sunday school and prayer meetings. Not all appreciated this new doctrine of living free from sin, and soon the worshippers were barred from the schoolhouse and limited to meetings in nearby homes. When they constructed a simple log church across the road from the schoolhouse, the antagonism was so great the structure was dismantled and burned. In succeeding years, persecutions continued and many, including Bryant, were turned out of their churches for this new doctrine of holiness.

Under Bryant's leadership and in the midst of on-going persecution, many people experienced changed lives and extraordinary spiritual manifestations such as speaking in tongues and divine healings. The earliest history suggests that over one hundred persons spoke in tongues during this period of persecution and revival.⁹ Despite their Spirit baptism, they had no clear understanding of the Holy Spirit and likely considered speaking in tongues one of many manifestations that might accompany sanctification. Empowered by the Spirit, they preached the message of holiness with conviction and fervor. A lack of organization along with the fanatical elements of the Fire-Baptized movement prevented much growth among those at Camp Creek, however.

R. G. Spurling often worshipped with the little flock meeting in Bryant's home and encouraged them to organize a local church, but Bryant and others were slow to see the need. It was not until May 15, 1902, under the leadership of Spurling, that a local church was organized among the Camp Creek believers. Although previous churches Spurling organized had called themselves Christian Union, this group was deeply shaped by the Holiness movement. They identified themselves as the Holiness Church at Camp Creek.¹⁰ About sixteen or seventeen members covenanted together as a local church, and the fledgling group selected Spurling as pastor and ordained Bryant as a minister of the Gospel. There was no growth among the congregation, however, until the following June when A. J. Tomlinson (1865-1943) and four others joined the small flock.

Tomlinson can be characterized as a missionary and a seeker. Born into a Quaker farm family in Westfield, Indiana, he was converted shortly after his marriage in 1889 and

soon became convinced of the doctrine of entire sanctification. Following his sanctification experience, Tomlinson began to minister wherever he saw a need—first in his local congregation as a Sunday school teacher and later as a preacher of the Gospel. Seeing great needs among the “mission field” in the mountains of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and northern Georgia, Tomlinson traveled to that region as a Bible salesman for the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society in 1896.

His early ministry included travel with J. B. Mitchell, a convert of Charles G. Finney. Along the way he met many leading ministers such as D. L. Moody and A. B. Simpson, and he studied for a while at God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. Then in 1901, he visited Frank W. Sandford’s Shiloh near New Durham, Maine. There he studied at Sandford’s “Holy Ghost and Us” Bible school, was baptized in water for the third time and joined Sandford’s organization, which saw itself as the restoration of God’s church at the end of the Gentile age.

Tomlinson met W. F. Bryant after selling five-cent New Testaments to Bryant’s young boys. The boys suggested that he meet their “powerful religious” father, and Tomlinson became acquainted with the holiness work at Camp Creek. During the next seven years Tomlinson developed deep spiritual friendships with Bryant, Spurling and others in and around the Camp Creek community, but he too resisted the idea of organization.¹¹ As late as 1908 Tomlinson sent out a letter to supporters around the country identifying himself as a “Missionary Evangelist” to the poor and unreached in the region.

In 1899 Tomlinson settled with his family in nearby Culberson, North Carolina, to establish a ministry base. Soon he founded a school for children, a Sunday school, a clothing distribution center and an orphanage. As a means of appealing for financial support, Tomlinson published a four-page periodical called *Samson’s Foxes*. He envisioned the children to whom he ministered as potential firebrands of the gospel among the Appalachian people. The periodical featured news from the Diving Healing and Holiness movements as well as appeals for help for the “mountain missionary work.”

After years of searching and seeking God, this man of vision, passion and ability found a home among the Holiness Church at Camp Creek—convinced that they were the Church of God of the Bible. He later wrote about his early experiences, “I had already searched and investigated many movements until my faith in them had completely exhausted. I seemed to be like a ship at sea with no rudder by which it should be controlled.”¹² In R. G. Spurling, Tomlinson found a spiritual father and mentor. In W. F. Bryant, he found a brother and companion in ministry, and in the people of the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, he found a home and a congregation that deeply wanted to please God and restore the New Testament church of God.

When Tomlinson covenanted with the Holiness Church at Camp Creek, the small congregation already knew and loved Tomlinson. They immediately selected him as their pastor, freeing Bryant and Spurling for evangelistic ministry. According to the records, fourteen new members

-27, 1906. Twenty-one people braved the winter weather to gather in the home of J. C. Murphy, a deacon of the Camp Creek congregation. There they prayed, studied the scriptures and sought answers to important questions that had emerged. The printed minutes of that meeting reflected their restorationism with the preface,

We hope and trust that no person or body of people will ever use these minutes, or any part of them, as articles of faith upon which to establish a sect or denomination. The subjects were discussed merely to obtain light and understanding. Our articles of faith are inspired and given us by the Holy Apostles and written in the New Testament which is our only rule of faith and practice.¹⁴

In its first action, the Assembly declared, “We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only.” This reflected their intention to search the scriptures for the laws of God and then recommend action to the local churches. The congregational polity of the time depended on the local churches to execute God’s laws as revealed in the New Testament. This did not prohibit the Assembly from having executive offices or the church from developing hierarchical administrative structures. Indeed, at that first Assembly, A. J. Tomlinson served as moderator and clerk, and in 1909 the Assembly created the office of general moderator. Yet, that first action of the Assembly remained the movement’s policy recognizing that it was not the purpose of the Assembly to make God’s laws or to carry out God’s laws. Subsequently a complex administrative organization has developed to provide resources to local congregations.

The topics discussed at that first Assembly reveal the issues with which those early congregations wrestled: keeping local church records, having family worship, building Sunday

schools, practicing communion and feet washing, holding weekly prayer meetings, opposing the use of tobacco, and transferring church membership. Evangelism was particularly heavy on the hearts of the delegates and after hearing reports of recent efforts, the Assembly agreed to “do our best to press into every open door this year and work with greater zeal and energy for the spread of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God than ever before.” Further, the delegates recommended an annual Assembly for the purpose of “closer union and fellowship” among the churches. Finally, the Assembly concluded,

It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and us, being assembled with one accord, with the Spirit of Christ in the midst, and after much prayer, discussion, searching the Scriptures and counsel, to recommend these necessary things and that they be ratified and observed by all the local churches. It is the duty of the Church to execute the laws given us by Christ through His Holy Apostles.¹⁵

Through subsequent annual Assemblies, the people sought God and searched the Scriptures in order to develop and define practice and polity. This reflected their deep conviction that the Bible holds the guidelines and instructions for Christianity in the twentieth century as well as the first century. It also reflected a well-intentioned, if not a little naive, belief of the young movement that when the exact New Testament order was found, they would experience the same supernatural growth and success as the Apostles following the day of Pentecost. Tomlinson wrote, “So when the Church gets in perfect order as it was in apostolic days, the gospel will go forth and souls’ [*sic*] by the multitudes will be gathered in.”¹⁶

Three events at the Second Annual Assembly seem particularly important today. First, the ministers met separately in a “Preacher’s Conference.” Beginning as an occasional practice, this set a precedent for the ministers to discuss some matters apart from the greater body. Especially important was the movement’s adoption of the name “Church of God,” based on Paul’s references to the Church of God in First and Second Corinthians. Certainly, there had been an attempt to be biblical in all things since the 1886 invitation to sit “together as the Church of God.” And when he received the right hand of fellowship in 1903, Tomlinson had insisted on an agreement that the Holiness Church at Camp Creek was “the Church of God of the Bible.” Thus, this adoption of the name in 1907 was a further step toward restorationism. Finally, the second Assembly instituted a new order of ministry--that of “evangelist.” Heretofore, the people had recognized the primary orders of Bishop (sometimes called Elder), Deacon and Licensed Minister. In following years the Assembly would abandon the order of Deacon and initiate a lay order of Exhorter which eventually became the initial level of ministry. Today the Church of God recognizes the ranks of Ordained Minister, Licensed Minister and Exhorter as well as Licensed Minister of Christian Education and Licensed Minister of Music.

Other important matters of polity that have developed in succeeding Assemblies include the 1909 selection of a general moderator to serve year-round (renamed general overseer in 1910) and the appointment of state overseers in 1911. An Elders Council was adopted in 1916 to conduct necessary business between Assemblies. Because of the heavy workload of the general overseer, the 1922 Assembly selected a three-person committee comprised of the

general overseer, a superintendent of education and an editor and publisher. Now known as the General Executive Committee, this body oversees the ongoing ministry of the international church and eventually expanded to include the general overseer, three assistant general overseers and a general secretary-treasurer.

Today the general business of the Church of God occurs on four levels. First is the on-going ministry of the General Executive Committee and the departments that the church has developed to implement its ministries. Additionally, the General Executive Council meets several times a year to consider the budget and the progress of the church. This Council is comprised of the General Executive Committee, the Council of Eighteen (an expansion of the Elders Council) and the overseer of the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa. The General Executive Council also prepares the agenda for the General Council that meets prior to each General Assembly. This General Council is made up of all Ordained ministers who wish to attend. It nominates the General Executive Committee, elects the Council of Eighteen and prepares the agenda for the General Assembly. The biennial General Assembly is comprised of all Church of God members age sixteen and over who wish to attend. It elects the General Executive Committee and considers matters of importance to the entire denomination.

A momentous service followed the third Assembly in 1908 that radically transformed the life and ministry of A. J. Tomlinson. Following a sermon by guest evangelist G. B. Cashwell, Tomlinson received his long-sought-for experience of Spirit baptism. Although perhaps one hundred or more people had experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit following the Shearer Schoolhouse revival in 1896, they apparently did not fully understand the nature and the work of the Holy Spirit at that time. Those who did receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit had not preached that this was an experience for all to seek and obtain.

Tomlinson serves as an excellent example of how countless people in the Holiness movement came into the full realization of the work of the Holy Spirit. The record shows that like many others he sought for a deeper experience following his sanctification. He likely heard people in the Camp Creek community speaking in tongues and may have heard tongues speech when he visited Sanford's Shiloh community in Maine in 1901. Yet, he personally credited William Seymour with developing the doctrine of "the baptism with the Holy Ghost and the speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance as the evidence."¹⁷ According to Tomlinson, he "became more fully awakened on the subject" in January of 1907 and spent the entire year preaching about and seeking for the experience. He wrote,

I did not have the experience, so I was always among the seekers at the altar.
The Lord gave great revivals, and souls were converted and sanctified, and some really went through and were baptized with the Holy Ghost evidenced by the speaking in tongues.¹⁸

In June of that year, Tomlinson and M. S. Lemons traveled to Birmingham, Alabama, to attend a meeting conducted by M. M. Pinson and Cashwell. Cashwell was fresh from his Spirit baptism at Azusa Street and was touring the South with the good news of Pentecost. Sometime after the Alabama meeting Tomlinson invited Cashwell to visit Cleveland; and it was following

Cashwell's sermon on January 12, 1908, that Tomlinson received his baptism. While some of the members and ministers of the Church of God had received their experiences in 1896 and the intervening years, with Tomlinson's Spirit baptism, the Church of God was transformed into a herald of Pentecost.

A Painful Divorce

Such transformation was characteristic of Tomlinson's leadership. He transformed a small Appalachian congregation into a movement with a vision to reach beyond the Unicoi Mountains. He transformed a group of churches organized according to Baptist polity into a centralized and episcopal organization. And he filled that organization with the conviction that through them God was doing an extraordinary work in these "last days" and with the expectation that all of Christianity would come to know the biblical church as they knew it.

Yet, Tomlinson's leadership would come to an end in the Church of God. From 1903 to 1923 this visionary leader proposed ministries and willingly accepted the mandate of the membership to lead those ministries. For most of those twenty years the membership loved and followed their charismatic leader. They gladly supported his proposals and pushed him forward as God's theocratic leader of the Church of God. The dawn of the twenties saw increasing dissatisfaction lead to disillusionment and impeachment, however. The long developed pattern of Tomlinson leading almost every ministry of the church worked less and less well as Tomlinson grew older and the church grew larger. He became increasingly less able to handle every detail of the heavy burden of administration. And when voices of dissent emerged among the Elders Council, he considered them both a personal affront and an attack on God's plan for theocratic church government. While increasing numbers of people believed that growth demanded changes, Tomlinson became more and more entrenched.

A financial crisis brought about by a weakened economy, an enormous debt and poor management precipitated the final confrontation. Tomlinson's handling of the financial crisis gave cause for those who wanted to see changes in administrative practices to concur with those who wanted to dislodge Tomlinson from the general overseer's office. In July 1923, Tomlinson was removed from the office of the general overseer. The Elders Council selected F. J. Lee to lead the Church of God. Tomlinson, a tireless and unstoppable leader, continued at the helm of a smaller group that he believed was the Church of God. Courts forced them to use a different name, however. First known as the "Church of God, over which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer," this denomination has since adopted the name Church of God of Prophecy. Today, both the Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy carry on Tomlinson's legacy—a vision for world harvest.

A Vision for World Harvest

As the Church of God became firmly established in Cleveland, Tennessee, leaders began to look outward toward a world harvest. The earliest realization of this vision was in the southeastern United States with successful revivals and resulting congregations in Florida and Alabama. In 1909, Tomlinson had extraordinary success at the Pleasant Grove Campground near Tampa, Florida. While in Florida, Tomlinson received into the Church of God several ministers who would provide leadership in the following decades. Among them were native Bahamians Edmond and Rebecca Barr, who received the baptism with the Holy Spirit during that meeting, and a retired Methodist minister, R. M. Evans. In November the Barrs set sail for their homeland, becoming the first Church of God ministers to take the gospel outside the United States. After selling his own possessions to finance the trip, R. M. Evans joined the Barrs in the Bahama Islands in January 1910. His wife and the young Carl M. Padgett accompanied him. Thus, Evans became the first Church of God missionary to take the gospel from homeland to foreign soil.

Church of God missions activity remained largely unorganized for several years. There were few resources and even Herculean efforts appear small by today's standards. Most early Church of God missionaries were independent pioneers. Charles W. Conn accurately described the "primitive period" of Pentecostal missions as a time when missionaries often went on their own without the sponsorship of denominational boards. They frequently represented the Pentecostal message rather than any one organization and corresponded with several groups and publications in order to establish adequate support. During this period, the Church of God supported several such missionaries with offerings, prayers and reports in *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*. Besides the work in the Bahamas, these included Sarah A. Smith in Nihela, Egypt, Lillian Trasher in Assiout, Egypt and Lucy M. Leatherman in Latin America.¹⁹

Other Church of God missionaries followed the example of Evans. Sam C. Perry took the Pentecostal message to Cuba in 1910. Brinson and Jennie Rushin traveled to China in 1914. F. L. Ryder sailed to the Virgin Islands where he established a church before traveling on to South America in 1917. Key missions efforts included Maria Atkinson to Mexico in 1931 and Herman Lauster to his home in Germany in 1936. Robert F. Cook brought his mission in India into the Church of God in 1936, and Paul C. Pitt's mission in China came into the Church of God in 1937. Then Edmond and Pearl Stark took the Church of God to Angola in 1938. When Edmond became stricken with malaria and died, the burden for Angola was not buried with him. Pearl Stark returned to Angola in 1947 to minister the gospel alone.

Despite the inauspicious beginning of Church of God world missions, both fund raising and organizational structures gradually developed. The first recorded local church missions offering was \$7.00 received in the Arcadia, Florida, church in April 1910. The first Assembly offering for missions was \$21.05 received in 1911 to send to Evans in the Bahama Islands. The 1913 Assembly discussed a systematic blueprint to raise missions offerings, and the church selected F. J. Lee as general missions treasurer after the approval of the plan in 1914. This initial strategy called for local churches to receive monthly offerings and for pastors to emphasize the

cause of missions. It was modified in 1927 by a mandate for all local churches to raise offerings equal to five percent of their tithes with these moneys divided between home and world missions.

Beginning in 1911, each Assembly included a Missions Committee to make recommendations regarding home and world missions. In 1926, this was changed to a standing board in order to further the work of foreign missions. Then in 1936, the Church of God appointed J. H. Ingram as a Foreign Missions Field Representative. That year, Ingram took a "Golden Jubilee Tour" to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Church of God and traveled 44,000 miles visiting thirty-one countries and colonies. Later M. P. Cross became the first full-time World Missions Executive Secretary in 1942, and the church began appointing Area Superintendents in 1945, including Carl J. Hughes as Superintendent of Bermuda and the West Indies and Vessie D. Hargrave as Superintendent of Latin America. Further progress in 1945 included the establishment of a Spanish edition of the *Church of God Evangel*, *El Evangelio de la Iglesia de Dios* as well as the appointment of the first full-time Missions Representative, Johnnie M. Owens, who traveled the United States promoting world missions. Partnership with the Church of God Youth and Christian Education Department led to the establishment of Youth World Evangelism Appeal in 1957 (now Youth World Evangelism Action). Each year, Church of God youth tackle an important project such as building facilities for missionary training centers, local churches or educational institutions.

In 1964, giving to Church of God world missions reached over one million dollars for a single year. By 1981, the giving of Youth World Evangelism Action alone exceeded one million dollars in one year. Such sacrifice at home and abroad brought substantial growth to the Church of God. Indeed, the year 1966 witnessed membership in missions areas surpass that of the United States and Canada. In the fall of 1997, the ministry of Church of God world missions included over 3,831,000 members, 23,000 ministers, 20,000 churches and 7,400 preaching stations in 137 countries other than the United States and Canada.²⁰

Part of the growth of the Church of God around the world has come through partnerships by way of affiliation and amalgamation with national churches. For example, the Apostolic Church of God in Romania began in 1922 after Persida Bradin was miraculously healed and George Bradin received two brochures published by the Church of God. The Bradins established a church in their home predicated on the doctrines of the Church of God in the United States but had little contact with the Cleveland-based fellowship. Despite early persecution, the church in Romania grew from its initial eight members. With the fall of communism came rapid growth resulting in 450,000 baptized believers by 1997 when they celebrated their seventy-fifth anniversary. Ties were reestablished with the Cleveland offices in 1980. In addition to 2,068 churches, the Apostolic Church of God in Romania supports two theological seminaries, two two-year colleges and four high schools.²¹

Other partnerships include amalgamation with the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa in 1951 and the Bethel Full Gospel Church in Indonesia in 1967, which now has a membership

of 1.3 million. Recent alliances were reached with the Latvian Pentecostal Union and the Full Gospel Church of Vietnam in 1995.

The vision for world harvest has long been more than just a North American vision. Today many nations send missionaries to countries other than their own. Among innumerable efforts Korean missionaries have established the Church of God in Nepal, South Americans have sent missionaries to Russia, Indonesians have planted churches in China, and Word for the World, a Church of God ministry in the Philippines, has established churches in over ten nations, including the United States.

A Strong Foundation

A strong foundation undergirds this herald of Pentecost with a vision for world harvest. Sound biblical doctrine and the practical expression of Christian service have characterized the ministry of the Church of God, and a variety of ministries have developed and expanded from the earliest Assemblies. Some of these ministries include publishing, media, education, benevolence, specialized ministries to youth, Christian educators, women, military and clergy as well as evangelism in the United States and around the world.

Sound Biblical Doctrine

Although Spurling and other early leaders rejected Christianity based on human creeds, they were not libertine in their theology. They resolutely believed that the New Testament held all that was necessary to know and serve Christ and that Spirit-led individuals in Christian community could interpret and understand biblical truth. Yet, they were convinced that any creedal statement of that truth was bound to be fallible and lead to division rather than Christian union. With roots deeply anchored in Protestant and Anabaptist theology, the earliest known covenant accentuated the New Testament as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” According to Spurling, the 1895 basis of union rejected creeds and accepted

the law of love instead of faith, faith in Christ being the only faith required in the gospel and love being the commandment of Christ, by which we should know each other as His disciples.

We further agree that the New Testament contains all things necessary for salvation and church government. So all dealings must be on gospel principles. Baptism, the Lord’s supper and feet-washing, as taught in the Scriptures and that each member shall have equal rights and privileges to read, believe and practice for themselves in all matters of religion that may not prove contrary to the law of love or the true spirit of Christianity. We invite to union and fellowship all persons who avow faith in Christ and love to God and His people and a willingness to live a Christian life so as not to dishonor the cause of Christ, and we exclude only for known violations of God’s Word or commands.²²

In succeeding years, the sentiment of this early statement continued to guide the theological life of the movement. Occasionally, needs for further statements arose in the on-going life of the church, however. In 1910, the Assembly appointed a committee to prepare examination questions and biblical references for ministerial candidates.²³ Later that year, Tomlinson published the work of this committee under the title “The Church of God.” Noting that the church stood for “the whole Bible rightly divided” with the New Testament as the only rule for faith and government, the article listed “some of the teaching that is made prominent.” This list of twenty-five items included basic statements and scriptural references. Some of these statements focused on Christian doctrine such as “Repentance: Mark 1:15, Luke 13:3, Acts
ments highlighted the Christian life as they believed it should be lived such as “Total abstinence from all liquor or strong drinks: Prov. 20:1, Prov. 23:29-32, Isa. 28:7, I Cor. 5:11, 1 Cor. 6:10, Gal. 5:21.” These statements clearly were not meant to serve as a creed or to be an exhaustive list of all that Church of God people believed.²⁴

The 1912 Assembly discussed these statements at length. Following some minor changes, such as dropping the word immersion from the statement on water baptism because it is not found in the Bible, they recommended that the “teachings” be reprinted.²⁵ These teachings have remained an important statement of Biblical doctrine and practice for the Church of God. From time to time, the church has amended the list as weighty issues emerged in the life of the denomination. In 1988 the Assembly highlighted Christian lifestyle by changing statements on the Christian life to proactive declarations on spiritual example, moral purity, personal integrity, family responsibility, behavioral temperance, modest appearance and social obligation.²⁶

The historic anti-creedal approach of the Church of God has allowed for the development of some diversity on theological matters. This has been especially true regarding the doctrine of sanctification. Early leaders of the movement were clearly Wesleyan-holiness in belief and practice—espousing the belief in a subsequent work of grace that cleansed the believer from the roots of sin. Yet, these leaders preached about the practice of a holy lifestyle more than they preached about the finer points of their theology. Consequently the Church of God accepted within its membership and ministry those who held to the “Finished Work” doctrine of sanctification.

In the 1940s deep division arose between proponents of differing views of sanctification. Charles W. Conn characterized the ensuing debate as “centered not so much on the reality of sanctification as on the time and process of its inception in the human heart. Some held vigorously that it is an instantaneous or ‘definite,’ work of grace, and others believed it to be

²⁷ In the midst of this debate, the church saw the need for a clarifying statement of faith and adopted the following Declaration of Faith in 1948.

DECLARATION OF FAITH

We believe:

1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
2. In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. That he ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.
5. That justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word, and by the Holy Ghost.
7. Holiness to be God's standard of living for His people.
8. In the baptism of the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.
9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost.
10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
11. Divine healing is provided for all in the Atonement.
12. In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.
13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.
14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked.

This declaration was not considered a new doctrine or an exhaustive creed but simply a statement of what the church had always believed was taught in the New Testament. The language on sanctification remained Wesleyan-holiness, but the church allowed individuals the right to interpret "subsequent" as logical rather than temporal.²⁸

Publishing and Media Ministries

Publishing was an ongoing interest of A. J. Tomlinson well before he received the right hand of fellowship from the Holiness Church at Camp Creek. Newspapers and religious periodicals filled the silent days before the advent of radio and television, and Tomlinson recognized that the printed word was the lifeline for many successful ministries. Following his 1901 four-page leaflet *Samson's Foxes*, Tomlinson inaugurated a second paper in January 1904 called *The Way* based on Jesus' statement, "I am the way." Tomlinson and M. S. Lemons edited this publication, which featured articles, sermons and poetry on holiness. The cost of a subscription was ten cents per year, and the four-page paper continued until September 1905.

Church of God publications began in a rented twenty-by-thirty feet frame building across the street from Tomlinson's home in Cleveland. The church bought the tiny building in 1917 and eventually completed three additions to the original plant. In 1935, the church built a new

Publishing House several blocks away on Montgomery Avenue, its present location. The Publishing House erected its current building in 1953 and has expanded the facility several times including the addition of Pathway Bookstore.²⁹

March 1, 1910 heralded the first issue of *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, which remains the official voice of the Church of God. The masthead of that first issue included quotations of Acts 2:1, 2:4 and 10:46. The title reflected both the words of Zechariah, “But it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light” (14:7), and the church’s confidence that they were living in the evening of the gospel age. The Pentecostal light was that evening light sent to provide for the gathering of the final harvest. Tomlinson wrote on page one,

The command to go, the command to evangelize is just as forcible to-day [*sic*] upon us whom the ends of the world have come as it was when first uttered by our Lord and great Head of the Church. They were successful in the morning light. We must be just as much so in the evening light. . . . The Holy Spirit was given to the disciples in the morning to give them power to accomplish just what they did accomplish. He is given to us today for the same purpose. We dare not falter. We dare not quail. We dare not even fear. The time is short. The harvest is ripe. The sickle must be furbished and put into use. The precious fruit of the earth must be reaped. It must be done quickly.³⁰

Early issues of *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* included lead articles by Editor A. J. Tomlinson, editorials, sermons, articles on doctrinal themes, reports of ministry activities and testimonies. It was common for the editor to reprint articles that appeared in other religious periodicals. For example, the first issue published an article by A. J. Gordon, a Baptist minister and missionary, on “God’s Tenth.” Also in the first issue was a discussion of the latter rain—another principal explanation of the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals noted that the early and latter rains came in Palestine for first the planting and then the final growth of the harvest. Likewise, the Holy Spirit was poured out in the New Testament for the planting of the church and was being poured out in the twentieth century for the final harvest. According to the author, “Since the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit in Los Angeles, California, in 1906, it has belted the globe, and is flooding every country on the face of the earth with its power and glory.”³¹

The first issue of *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel* was eight pages and about 8 ½ by 11 inches. The biweekly publication sold for three cents per copy with a one-year subscription costing fifty cents. In 1911 the name was changed to *The Church of God Evangel* as it is today.³² By 1914 the subscription cost had risen to one dollar and the format had changed to the style of a large newspaper. For a time, the *Evangel* was published weekly. Today it is a monthly four-color publication with a magazine format.

Other early Church of God publications included minutes of the Assemblies, tracts and an occasional book such as the 1922 *The Book of Doctrines*,³³ which gave a synopsis of doctrine and practice. Additionally, the Publishing House published Sunday school literature and publications for the growing ministries of the church. The work had grown so much by 1916 that the Assembly selected a publishing committee to oversee the publishing interests. A. J. Tomlinson remained the editor until 1922 when the Assembly named J. S. Llewellyn as editor and publisher. In 1956, the Church of God Publishing House began publishing books under the trade name Pathway Press.

Today communicating the gospel takes place in a variety of formats including radio and television. Under General Overseer John C. Jernigan the Church of God broadcast sermons on the radio in the late 1940s from a station near the Mexican border, but this was short-lived. The 1956 Assembly initiated a regular radio program that continues today. *Forward in Faith* first aired December 7, 1958 with announcer Bennie S. Triplett and speaker Earl P. Paulk, Jr. Six stations carried the first broadcast. The program expanded to fifty stations within the first year and is now available in fifteen, twenty-five and thirty-minute formats with Pastor Loran Livingston. A new five-minute daily radio broadcast called *Oasis* began in 1991 with Evangelist Carl Richardson. In recent years *Forward in Faith* has sponsored occasional television programs and has led to the development of the Department of Media Ministries.³⁴

Education

For A. J. Tomlinson, education was important tool for reaping the world harvest. Not only did he have a school for children in his home at Culberson, North Carolina, he also saw the need to prepare men and women for Christian service. In his introduction of the subject to the sixth Assembly in 1911, Tomlinson voiced, in his colorful style, the need for such a preparatory school.

Eleventh hour laborers are needed, and there are such lying around because no man has hired them. This class ought to be picked up and sent into the vineyard, and they might be able to carry in to the Master of the vineyard a basket of large luscious grapes that otherwise would be lost. . . . A few months training would be of great value to workers who have just enlisted in the service.³⁵

The minutes recorded an enthusiastic response, and the Assembly appointed committees to find a location, to serve as trustees and to serve as an education board.

For the next several years, discussions of costs, location and facilities occupied those interested in a school. Yet, because no action had been taken, at the thirteenth Assembly in 1917 Tomlinson pleaded once again for a school, suggesting that some Church of God people were going to other schools and consequently losing their “fiery zeal.” In response to Tomlinson, a Committee on the Bible Training School resolved to open a school in Cleveland with Tomlinson as superintendent.

The first class of the Church of God Bible Training School met on January 1, 1918. The teacher was Nora Chambers, a licensed evangelist who had been working in the Publishing House as a proofreader. Chambers had attended Holmes College of the Bible in South Carolina and was one of the most educated ministers in the Church of God at that time. Twelve students began and six completed the first three-month term. They paid one dollar per week for tuition and studied the Bible, *Hurlbut's Teacher-Training Lessons*, geography, spelling, English and music.³⁶ The Bible Training School was renamed Lee College in 1947 after F. J. Lee, who served as both the second superintendent of the school and the second general overseer of the denomination. The College added a liberal arts program in 1968 and achieved university status in 1997. Lee University continues to expand its programs, currently offering graduate studies in church music, education, liberal arts and counseling psychology.

Other educational ministries of the Church of God have included several Bible schools and a Theological Seminary in North America as well as numerous schools around the world. Following successful Bible courses under the direction of Pastor Frank Lemons in Lemmon, South Dakota, State Overseer Paul H. Walker asked the 1934 Assembly for permission to establish a permanent school in the Northwest due to the distance to the Bible Training School in Cleveland. With permission granted, the second term of Northwest Bible and Music Academy began in 1935. When the Church of God purchased a campground in Minot, North Dakota, the school moved to those facilities. Later renamed Northwest Bible College, the school operated until 1987. Pacific Northwest Bible School was established in Yakima, Washington, in 1944 but closed after only three years. In 1949 reorganization took place in Pasadena, California, under the name West Coast Bible School. It was relocated to Fresno, California, in 1950³⁷ and operated until 1992. Ministerial training in the western United States currently includes the Western School of Christian Ministries as well as Church of God affiliation with Patten College in Oakland, California. Evangelist Bebe Patten had founded Patten College as the Oakland Bible Institute following a nineteen-week evangelistic crusade in Oakland in 1944.³⁸

Three additional Church of God Bible schools operate in North America. In the Northwest, J. W. Bruce served as the first president of International Bible College founded in 1936 in Consul, Saskatchewan (now located in Moose Jaw). Situated in the southern United States, the International Preparatory Institute began in San Antonio, Texas, in 1947 as a training center for Latin American missionaries. Vessie D. Hargrave was the founder and first president. Its closure in 1954 was followed by the opening of the Spanish Institute of Ministries in Houston in 1975, which was merged with West Coast Christian College in 1983. The Institute found itself without a home when West Coast was closed in 1992, but reopened in 1994 in Dallas, Texas, as the Hispanic Institute of Ministry under the leadership of President Isaias Robles. In the eastern United States, following over twenty-five years of operating a Summer Music

and Bible Institute, the ministers of North Carolina established East Coast Bible College in Charlotte in 1976. George D. Voorhis served as the first president.³⁹

Graduate ministerial training began in 1975 with the establishment of the Church of God Graduate School of Christian Ministries in Cleveland. Now called the Church of God Theological Seminary, the first president was General Overseer Wade H. Horton, and R. Hollis Gause served as the first dean. Other schools offering graduate ministerial training include: the Gereja Bethel Seminary in Jakarta, Indonesia; Asian School of Christian Ministries in Manila, Philippines; Han Young Theological University in Seoul, Korea; Seminario Biblico Mexicano in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico; Colegio Biblico Pentecostal in St. Just, Puerto Rico; and the Seminario Ministerial Sudamericano in Quito, Ecuador.⁴⁰

In addition to those offering graduate training, the Church of God operates seventy-four Bible schools and training programs outside the United States.⁴¹

The flagship of non-residential training for the Church of God is the Ministerial Internship Program. Robert E. Fisher originated this combination of practical and academic study while serving as state overseer of Hawaii in 1970, and the General Assembly adopted the concept in 1978. Since 1982 the church has required the completion of MIP for advancement to the rank of Licensed Minister. By 1996 the program was operating in twenty-eight countries and in six languages.⁴² When the General Assembly adopted the MIP, the General Board of Education, which had been established in 1968, administered the program. Today the Office of Ministerial Development coordinates this expanding program along with licensure resources and other development opportunities such as Ministerial Development Institutes.

Benevolence

Although the Church of God did not establish a comprehensive Department of Benevolence until 1974, caring for the needy has always been a natural characteristic of holiness, Spirit-filled people. Tomlinson provided food and clothing for the students attending school in his home in 1900. In a letter printed in the first issue of *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, W. F. Bryant revealed his custom of taking clothing to the barefooted needy in the Tellico Mountains of eastern Tennessee.⁴³ In 1902 Tomlinson attempted to establish an orphanage in Culberson, and in Cleveland Bryant followed suit in 1911. In 1910, missionary Lillian Trasher went to Egypt and founded an orphanage in Assiout. Writing about the meager resources available, Trasher wrote to *Church of God Evangel* readers, "I now have 51 little orphans, many of whom are saved, and the rest are babies which I believe God will save as they grow older."⁴⁴ Unfortunately the Church of God was unable to provide adequate resources and lost its connection with Trasher and her ministry. In another effort, Eustis, Florida, was the home of an orphanage established by Bishops J. H. Curry and N. S. Marcelle in 1920. It survived only a few years due to a shortage of funds, however.

With the outbreak of an international influenza epidemic in 1918, many of the world's children

were left without mothers, fathers or both. Tomlinson challenged the 1919 Assembly to respond to the needs of these children, and Orphanage No. 1 was opened in Cleveland on December 17, 1920. Mrs. Lillian Kinsey was the first matron, and four children soon called the modest, frame house their home. Orphanage No. 2 and Orphanage No. 3 opened their doors in the two succeeding years. Today the campus of the Church of God Home for Children occupies sixty-four acres in Sevierville, Tennessee, near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.⁴⁵

Since the Home for Children board was reorganized as the Department of Benevolence under Director W. J. Brown, it has undertaken a significant expansion of its ministries. In 1987, the department opened both Covenant Place, a home for unmarried pregnant teenagers, and the Crowley Center for Abused Children in Sevierville. New River Ranch, a West Virginia ministry for troubled teens, opened the following year. Additionally, the department instituted the Heart of Florida Youth Ranch in 1990 and launched Operation Compassion in 1994. Operation Compassion focuses on ministry to the elderly and the hungry.⁴⁶

Youth and Christian Education

Children, youth and Christian discipleship have been at the center of the Church of God's heart for ministry from the first Assembly in 1906. Speakers at that meeting highlighted the importance of both family worship and Sunday school. According to the Assembly, daily family worship was an essential component of Christian discipleship, and Sunday schools helped to elevate the morals of communities as well as instruct children in Word and worship. Further, the Assembly recognized that Sunday schools could be a vehicle to establish new churches.⁴⁷

The Reverend Lettie Cross preached the first Assembly youth service in 1924. Concerned about the "foolishness and frivolity" of youth in his day, General Overseer Lee asked Cross to preach on the topic "Should Young People Be Sober-minded?"⁴⁸ Although local and regional ministry to youth occurred in various places, the church was slow to form a general youth ministry. Advocates such as Alda B. Harrison (1877-1959), whose local Young People's Mission Band was successful in Cleveland, regularly championed the organization of a general church ministry. In 1929, with ideas and encouragement from several areas of the country, the church created the Young People's Endeavor.

Harrison was directly involved in another important ministry to youth that was born in 1929. The wife of a Presbyterian minister, Harrison received her Spirit baptism under the ministry of F. M. Britton while visiting Florida's Pleasant Grove camp meeting. Becoming a member of the Church of God three years later, she fulfilled God's call on her life by serving in the Presbyterian churches wherever her husband was pastor and by finding ways to minister to Church of God young people. From her Presbyterian manse, she established *The Lighted Pathway*, a magazine for Church of God youth. Full of inspirational features for the family, *The Lighted Pathway* ministered to generations of Church of God young people until its discontinuation in 1990.⁴⁹

The church took immense strides in 1946 when it forged a National Youth Department with Ralph E. Williams as director. Then in 1948 the work of the Sunday school was added to the responsibilities of the youth director. Known as the Department of Youth and Christian Education,⁵⁰ today's department provides materials and training for Christian educators, Sunday schools and family ministries such as Family Training Hour as well as resources for youth ministry.

Music

About 1918, the Church of God began producing limp back songbooks for its congregations. In January 1920, Tomlinson announced that the first edition of *Church of God Songs* was sold out of its 7,000 copies. The church organized Tennessee Music and Printing Company as a trade division of the Publishing House in 1931.⁵¹ Then in 1934 the Assembly created the office of music editor, and the church selected Otis L. McCoy to serve in this new ministry. Under McCoy's influence, the Church of God most often sang from "gospel" or "convention" songbooks. It was not until 1951 that the church published its first hymnbook, *Church Hymnal*.⁵² Although the church issued a new hymnal in 1969, *Hymns of the Spirit*, the ever-popular *Church Hymnal* continues to be a best seller for the company.

With increasing needs beyond the publication of music resources, the Church of God established the Department of Music Ministries in 1992 and appointed Delton Alford as the first department director. The new department continues to work with Pathway Press in the creation and printing of some music materials. Additionally, it promotes the use of music resources, the development of Licensed Ministers of Music and fellowship among music ministers. Through SpiritSound, the department provides recording facilities and promotion. Additionally, a Music Explosion conference is coordinated each year.⁵³

Women

The Church of God Department of Women's Ministries focuses primarily on ministries by and to lay women. The efforts of Jonnie Belle Wood initiated the organization of Women's Ministries. Wife of Texas Overseer S. J. Wood, she inspired the women of the church in Electra to make and sell quilts in order to purchase a piano for their local church during the financially difficult days of the late 1920s. Quilting and other moneymaking endeavors of the newly formed Ladies' Willing Workers Band became essential to the life of the congregation. In addition to their fund-raising efforts, the women emphasized prayer at their meetings.

Reports of their activities soon spread to other congregations, and Sister Wood brought the work of the LWWB to the attention of the denomination. In 1936 the General Assembly approved a motion calling for the organization of a Ladies' Willing Workers Band in every local church. Although the primary purpose of these local bands was to raise supplemental funds for their congregations, they also emphasized other concerns. One supporter advised,

Keep up the spirituality of the band by having prayer meetings and healing services each time you meet. Contribute regularly to the support of the Orphanage. Visit the sick and needy and make clothes for them. Also visit the discouraged and ask them to attend your meetings.⁵⁴

The LWWB gained national structure when the denomination selected the wife of the general overseer as national president in 1950 and then in 1964 organized a department under the leadership of an executive secretary, a board of directors, a president, and vice-presidents. The Reverend Ellen B. French served as the first Executive Secretary of the department. Two years later, the department began publishing the periodical *The Willing Worker*, later known as *Unique*, as well as organizing meetings at General Assemblies. Constantly adding to their activities, the department changed its name to Ladies Auxiliary in 1970, to Department of Ladies Ministries in 1982 and to Department of Women's Ministries in 1998.⁵⁵

Military

The Church of God has ministered to men and women in uniform through two avenues of ministry—Ministry to the Military and the Chaplains Commission. Interestingly, this vigorous ministry developed within a denomination that had strong pacifist tendencies in its early years. Due to the unpopularity of war following the turn of the century and perhaps the Quaker background of A. J. Tomlinson, the Church of God officially took a position against war at the thirteenth Assembly in 1918 when it added to the teachings a statement against members going to war. Yet, as the national opposition to war softened, and with Homer Tomlinson serving in the military at the end of World War I, the church's position on war began to change. Tomlinson wrote that military service might be one of God's tools for world evangelism. In 1928, the church changed its stance to an opposition to combat service. By World War II, the Church of God recognized the need to minister to member and non-member alike who served in the military.⁵⁶

Efforts to minister to soldiers during World War II included the commissioning of U. D. Tidwell to send letters and phonograph recordings to those in uniform, the travel of Frank W. Lemons from base to base for worship and individual ministry, the publishing and distributing of *Strength for Service* and the sending of *The Lighted Pathway* to armed forces. Additionally, there were countless efforts by congregations located near military personnel. Following the War, the Church of God officially changed its position on war by dropping its ban on combat service. Convening on the very day the Japanese surrendered ending World War II, the fortieth Assembly adopted the following statement.⁵⁷

The Church of God believes that nations can and should settle their differences without going to war; however, in the event of war, if a member engages in combatant service, it will not affect his status with the Church. In case a member is called into military service, who has conscientious objection to combatant service, the Church will support him in his constitutional rights.⁵⁸

General Overseer H. L. Chesser broached the need for Church of God chaplains at the 1952 Assembly. “Who will volunteer? Who will prepare himself?” challenged the general overseer.⁵⁹ Edward E. Shoupe was not present to hear Chesser’s challenge in 1952. As a former naval serviceman, Shoupe was busy serving as pastor and attending seminary. But, while ministering to a nearby Air Force base, Shoupe recognized his “special” abilities to minister to the armed forces. Overcoming numerous obstacles and discouragement, Shoupe was endorsed by the National Association of Evangelicals Commission on Chaplains and applied to be an Air Force Reserve chaplain. He was commissioned on July 24, 1956, and two years later the Air Force called Shoupe to active duty as the Church of God’s first military chaplain.⁶⁰ The Church of God Chaplains Commission was organized in 1978. B. J. Moffett served as the first chairman, and Retired Chaplain Robert D. Crick became the first director. The development of this commission allowed an increase in the rate of Church of God chaplains entering the armed forces and encouraged the expansion of chaplains’ ministry beyond the military.⁶¹

A dream of organized ministry to military personnel was born in the heart of J. Don Amison while he was serving in the army. Having served as a pastor of a congregation that ministered to the military while in Stuttgart, Germany, Amison recognized the needs of soldiers. According to Amison,

In New Ulm I received the vision and burden for what would someday be called the Church of God Ministry to the Military. As a noncommissioned officer, I was often detailed to patrol the bars and streets of our soldier-city, and my heart was broken by the sights of all those young men and women—someone’s sons and daughters, brothers and sisters—caught up in the same vices that had controlled me only a few years before.⁶²

Following his discharge from the Army, Amison planned to return to Germany to minister to military personnel there. With no ecclesial support and only by the generosity of friends and strangers, he departed the United States for Germany in 1961. Locating in Krehwinkel, home of the Church of God headquarters in Europe, Amison set about planning a Washington’s Birthday service for servicemen and fellowship leaders. Bolstered by God’s extraordinary provision for his needs, Amison held an organizational meeting following the successful worship service. Those in attendance established an office, selected a council, and appointed Amison as director of the European Division of the Church of God Servicemen’s Department. By March of 1961, Amison was publishing *On Guard* for military personnel.⁶³

Meanwhile, the Church of God officially recognized the need for ministry to the military and appointed H. D. Williams, Second Assistant General Overseer, as the first director of the Church of God Servicemen’s Department. Cautious about the work of Amison in Germany, the Church of God Executive Council did not formally support Amison’s burgeoning ministry until August of 1961.⁶⁴ God blessed the work of Amison and those that followed him, and the Church of God established Servicemen’s Centers throughout Europe and the Far East. In 1982, the department was renamed Ministry to the Military, long after the new nomenclature had gained common usage.⁶⁵

Clergy

In addition to ministerial training through educational institutions and the Office of Ministerial Development, the Church of God has given increasing attention to the care of its clergy and their families. Early efforts in this area included the ministry of the Department of General Education. Then in 1989, Robert D. Crick coordinated an Office of Ministerial Care at the same time that he served as Dean of Ministries at the Church of God Theological Seminary. Recognizing the increasing demands and pressures of ministry in today's world, the church appointed Sam Crisp as a full-time director in 1992.⁶⁶ Ministries include enrichment programs, telephone counseling, professional consultation and referral, crisis intervention, advocacy, and missionary care, along with SpiritCare for retired ministers and their spouses.⁶⁷ Today the office operates as the Center for Ministerial Care.

Evangelism and Lay Ministries

Evangelism was a burning issue at the first Assembly in 1906. The Assembly heard reports and many consecrated themselves to the work at hand. According to the minutes, "After the consideration of the ripened fields and open doors for evangelism this year, strong men wept and said they were not only willing but really anxious to go." The minutes recorded, "It is therefore the sense of this meeting that we do our best to press into every open door this year and work with greater zeal and energy for the spread of the glorious gospel of the Son of God than ever before."⁶⁸

In its early history, the Church of God spread rapidly in part because its people were evangelistic. Often relying on their own fervor and depending on an anticipated sovereign, supernatural supply of material necessities, people went to places of evangelism on their own, without support from any denominational agency. Recalling the early methods of spreading the message of the Church of God, General Overseer John C. Jernigan noted in 1948, "In the early days, when the brethren went out to hold revivals, there were no choirs, no church houses, and no money to sponsor them. They either went out singly or in small groups of workers, mostly inexperienced but full of fire and victory."⁶⁹ These evangelists demanded very little and received very little in terms of denominational resources.

The establishment of prayer meetings or Sunday schools in nearby communities was another method of church planting that Jernigan highlighted. These met in homes or whatever public facilities they could secure. After some time, the people invited a preacher for a revival. The preacher stayed in a private home and fasted, prayed and preached "until the power fell." This new location then became a starting point for outreach to another community.⁷⁰ Often these revivals lasted for weeks at a time.

Leadership of the Church of God began to recognize a need for more organization in the evangelistic thrust of the denomination in the early 1950s.⁷¹ In 1956, the General Assembly

created the National Evangelism Committee in order to support evangelists and create programs to assist churches in revival.⁷² According to Charles W. Conn, the Executive Council created the Evangelism and Home Missions Department in March 1963 in order to coordinate and direct the numerous evangelism efforts of the church.⁷³ The church appointed Walter R. Pettitt to serve as the first director of this department.

One of the concerns of the newly created department was the financial support of evangelists. The department recognized that these ministers had families and needed regular and dependable incomes just as much as the pastor of an established church.⁷⁴ Although the General Assembly provided guidelines for the salaries of pastors and denominational leaders, the department noted that there were no guidelines for paying evangelists.⁷⁵ In response to this need the department published materials to help pastors plan and promote revivals as well as provide for the financial expenses of a revival.⁷⁶

One of the solutions to the perceived economic dilemma of evangelists was the appointment of “official” evangelists on the state and national level. In large part this was done to supply financial support to some evangelists so that they would not be dependent on offerings, especially the offerings of small churches.⁷⁷ State offices appointed evangelists for their particular state,⁷⁸ and the Church of God’s general executive committee appointed national and metropolitan evangelists.

Soon after its establishment, the Evangelism and Home Missions Department began to emphasize lay evangelism and men’s ministries. This came from a recognition that laity must be involved in evangelism in order for local churches to grow.⁷⁹ One brochure later proclaimed,

The laity, God’s men and women, are the most strategic and valuable key to the evangelization of the world. If we understand, accept, and act on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, it would bring about a reformation such as the world has not seen since Martin Luther nailed his 95 Thesis [*sic*] to the door of the Church at Wittenburg, Germany.⁸⁰

Laity had always been important to the growth of the Church of God—not because of established programs but because all members of the church were involved in evangelism. Many accompanied evangelists as workers—ready to set up a tent, sing, testify, shout and pray. Those that did not accompany the evangelist supported nearby revivals. Additionally, lay people who lived in an area without a Church of God would open their homes to prayer meetings or Sunday schools. When a core group of people were attending, they would invite an evangelist to come and preach until a church was established. Perhaps the earliest example of this was W. F. Bryant. A layman in the Baptist church, he led prayer meetings and a Sunday school in his house following the Shearer Schoolhouse revival in 1896. Numerous congregations were established out of the work of such lay persons.

In addition to the work of the Sunday school and the Ladies’ Willing Workers Band, an important boost to the organization of lay efforts occurred in 1946 when Bible Training School

teacher Priscilla Passett (Odom) sponsored a Youth for Christ club. This club developed into the Pioneers for Christ Club in the 1950s under the leadership of Charles R. Beach.⁸¹ In addition to giving many Lee College students opportunity for on-the-job evangelism training, the club served as a model that would later be adopted by the entire denomination.

With the sights of the newly created Evangelism and Home Missions Department set on lay evangelism, the department appointed a National Laymen's Committee in 1964, which became the National Laymen's Board by 1966 with J. D. Silver as chair. A part-time Lay Affairs Office began in 1972, developed into a full-time office by 1976, and is the Lay Ministries Department today.⁸² Charles R. Beach served as the first Executive Secretary of this office, and Leonard Albert became Field Representative in 1974. Some of this department's ministries have included Schools of Lay Evangelism, Lay Literature for the Lost, International Lay Witness Week, Resurrection Breakfasts, International Laymen's Day and Pastor Appreciation Day.

Much of the early emphasis of the National Laymen's Board was on ministry to men, especially through the establishment of Men's Fellowships in local churches. These fellowships primarily involved lay men in the life of the local congregation.⁸³ In many ways they were the equivalent of the Ladies' Willing Workers Bands. Ministries included support of the local pastor, support of men in the local church and evangelism training and opportunities for men. Church of God Men's Fellowships began the *Laymen's Quarterly Newsletter* in the fall of 1972, now called *The Laity*.

Just as the Lay Ministries Department developed out of the Department of Evangelism and Home Missions, it has already birthed a new department—Men/Women of Action. This department sponsors teams of volunteers for construction, disaster relief, short-term missions and personal evangelism around the world. Combining evangelism and labor, these teams minister to churches, medical clinics, orphanages, schools and others in need. Under the auspices of Evangelism and Home Missions, the first team helped remodel England's Overstone College in 1984. With the leadership of Robert D. Pace, Men/Women of Action gained departmental status in 1994 and expected to send teams to more than fifty ministry projects in 1998.⁸⁴

African-American, Cross Cultural and Hispanic Ministries

From its inception, the Evangelism and Home Missions Department expressed an interest in ministering to native Americans. Previous Church of God ministry in the Dakotas and North Carolina was expanded to include the tribes of the American Southwest.⁸⁵ This interest in ministry to minority people groups has intensified as the denomination matured.

From at least 1909 African-Americans have participated in the Church of God movement. Edmond and Rebecca Barr were among some of the first black Americans to covenant with the church. The earliest black churches were organized soon thereafter in Florida. Shamefully, black clergy and membership faced severe prejudice and limitations in the American South.

Although white leadership expressed the love of Christ for their black brothers and sisters, they did not entirely escape the subtle taint of their racially sinful culture. Thus, church policies tended to be paternalistic at best.

In an effort to escape the difficulties of integrated fellowship in the South, and in response to the stated needs of their black brothers, Tomlinson called for a separation of ministries in 1919. Barr had served earlier from 1915-17 as overseer of black churches in Florida, and in 1922 Thomas J. Richardson was appointed as overseer. Thereafter, black overseers were appointed over black churches until 1958. Beginning in 1926, black churches held a “colored” Assembly until reunification with the white Assembly in 1966. Except in the state of Florida, the same state overseer now serves both black and white churches in North America. Recognizing the need for additional leadership among African-American churches, the Church of God appointed Wallace Sibley, Sr., as a Southeastern Regional Evangelism Director in 1978. This ministry has expanded since that time, and in 1992 Joseph E. Jackson was appointed as Director of the Department of Black Ministries.⁸⁶

Responding to the growing numbers of ethnic groups in North America, the Church of God began to look for ways to minister to these diverse people groups. Beginning in 1980, J. D. Golden inaugurated a variety of ministries in New York’s metropolitan area. Then in 1982, Billy J. Rayburn became a full-time director of Cross Cultural Ministries.⁸⁷

Ministry to Hispanic Americans initially grew out of the work of Vessie D. Hargrave. Based in San Antonio, Texas, he established the International Preparatory Institute, which provided pastors to Latin Americans at home and abroad. With Hispanic Americans quickly becoming the largest ethnic group in the United States, the Church of God held its first National Hispanic Conference in 1985 around the theme “That They All May Be One.” Today Hispanic ministry in the United States is divided into six regional groups with Hispanic overseers. The church established the Office of Hispanic Ministries in 1992 and appointed Esdras Betancourt to oversee this flourishing ministry.⁸⁸

Twenty-first Century Challenges

An aerial photograph of the Unicoi Mountains would primarily identify the mountaintops of that region. It would fail to observe much of the teeming life that abounds in the hollows, dales, creeks and streams of that small portion of God’s creation. So too this survey of the Church of God and its ministries only reveals the institutional highlights of what God has done through the people He has raised up from those mountains. Innumerable stories of God’s providence in the lives of people and ministries cannot be told in such a short account. Also missing are the many support ministries such as Business and Records, Computer and Information, Public Relations, Benefits Board, Legal Services and Stewardship—all working together to accomplish the mission of world harvest.

The twenty-first century holds innumerable challenges for the Church of God. Many of these challenges have emerged from successful ministry in the twentieth century. What does it mean to be a Holiness, Pentecostal and Evangelical church in today's multicultural world? How do we remain holiness without being legalistic, especially as the North American base becomes increasingly wealthy by today's standards? How do we retain important elements of our Pentecostal heritage and incorporate helpful, healthy elements of Charismatic and Third Wave Christianity? How can a North American church with a World Missions Department become truly international—empowering believers of all nationalities, races and ethnic groups to fully participate in the world harvest? How can we be more inclusive—not only of international leaders and members but of ethnic groups, minorities and women—in all areas of church life including General Assemblies, International Offices and church publications?

With God's grace, the resources of the twenty-first century will be the same resources of those first nine members meeting on the banks of Barney Creek—searching the scriptures, honoring the consciences of brothers and sisters and remaining open to the work and leading of the Holy Spirit—walking in the light as He shines the light on our path.

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¹ Quoted in A. J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Press of Walter E. Rodgers, 1913; rpt. Cleveland, Tenn.: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1984), 207.

² Statistics as of September 1997 from Office of Business and Records, Church of God International Offices, Cleveland, Tennessee. Actual membership was 4,648,497.

³ Tomlinson, *Last Great Conflict*, 206.

⁴ R. G. Spurling, *The Lost Link* (Turtletown, Tenn.: by author, 1920), 45.

⁵ Tomlinson, *Last Great Conflict*, 209.

⁶ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, Definitive Edition, 1886-1995* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1996), 21.

⁷ G. P. Spurling, "Biographical Sketch of the Reverend R. G. Spurling," typewritten manuscript in Hal Bernard Dixon Jr. Pentecostal Research Center, Cleveland, Tennessee. The most complete discussion of Spurling's ministry following 1886 is in Wade H. Phillips, "Concise History of the Church of God of Prophecy,"

Theological Seminary, Cleveland, Tennessee, 7 and 48ff, note 25.

⁸ Tomlinson, *Last Great Conflict*, 210.

⁹ Tomlinson, *Last Great Conflict*, 212.

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Educational Pioneer," *Church of God History and Heritage*,

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- ³⁷ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886-1976*, rev. ed. (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1977), 227-28, 280.
- ³⁸ Gary Moncher, ed., *Bebe Patten: Her Ministry Then and Now* (Oakland, Ca.: The Christian Evangelical Church of America, 1976), 11-12.
- ³⁹ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, def. ed., 285, 347, 563; and General Board of Education, *Educational Handbook of the Church of God* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Church of God General Board of Education, 1996), 18-19, 98.
- ⁴⁰ General Board of Education, *Educational Handbook of the Church of God*, 133-42.
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- ⁴³ W. F. Bryant, AWork in the Mountains of Tennessee, ≡ *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, March 1, 1910, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Lillian Trasher, "Assiout, Egypt," *The Church of God Evangel*, May 15, 1915, 3. See also Conn, *Where the Saints Have Trod*, 15-16.
- ⁴⁵ Gary Riggins and Jerome Hammond, *Reflections: The Seventy-Five Year Story of the Church of God Home for Children* (Sevierville, Tenn.: Church of God Home for Children, 1997), 17, 29-42.
- ⁴⁶ Riggins and Hammond, *Reflections*, 42-45.
- ⁴⁷ *Minutes of the General Assemblies, 1906-1914*, 15.
- ⁴⁸ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, def. ed., 229.
- ⁴⁹ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, def. ed., 151-54.
- ⁵⁰ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, def. ed., 331-32.
- ⁵¹ *The Ministry of Publications* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Church of God, n.d.); and Delton L. Alford, "The Sound and the Power: Essays on the Motivations, Developments, and Prospects of the Ministries of the Church of God," ed. Donald N. Bowdle (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1980), 211. See also, Buford M. Johnson, "Twentieth Century Moses" (unpublished manuscript, 1960), 217.
- ⁵² Alford, "The Sound and the Spirit," 210-12.
- ⁵³ "Changes in Church of God Affect Music, Ministerial Care," *Chattanooga Times*, February 1, 1992, E2; and "Music Ministries Started in '92," *Cleveland Daily Banner*, February 23, 1993, 4.
- ⁵⁴ B. L. Hicks, quoted in Mary L. Fisher and Mary-Margaret Morris, eds., *Church of God International Ladies Ministries Resource Guide*, rev. ed. (Cleveland, Tennessee: International Ladies Ministries, 1994), 36-37.
- ⁵⁵ Fisher and Morris, *Ladies Ministries Resource Guide*, 39-43.
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- ⁵⁷ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 18.
- ⁵⁸ *Minutes of the 40th Annual Assembly of the Church of God*, 31.
- ⁵⁹ *Minutes of the 44th General Assembly of the Church of God*, 13.
- ⁶⁰ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 21-27.
- ⁶¹ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 116-18.
- ⁶² Quoted in Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 41-42.
- ⁶³ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 42-47.
- ⁶⁴ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 49-51.
- ⁶⁵ Bershon, *With the Cross of Jesus*, 98.
- ⁶⁶ "Changes in Church of God Affect Music, Ministerial Care," E2.
- ⁶⁷ "Monumental Year for Ministerial Care," *Cleveland Daily Banner*, February 23, 1993, 10.
- ⁶⁸ "Minutes of the Annual Assembly," 4-5.
- ⁶⁹ John C. Jernigan, AAddress of the General Overseer, ≡ *Minutes of the 42nd General Assembly*, 13.
- ⁷⁰ Jernigan, AAddress of the General Overseer, ≡ 13.
- ⁷¹ Gene D. Rice, ABridging the Gap . . . How It All Started, ≡ *Flame*, Summer 1983, 2-3.
- ⁷² AThe Directors, ≡ *Flame*, Special Centennial Issue, 2.
- ⁷³ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, rev. ed., 330. According to Rice, these included general, state, district, and

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⁷⁸ Reports on the development of state evangelists with varying levels of financial and scheduling help from the state office appear in the first issue of *The Flame*. See A What Is the Church Doing?, 3, *The Flame*, Winter 1965, 12-14.

⁷⁹ For examples, see Ray H. Hughes, A Planting Growing Churches, 3, *Flame*, Summer 1979, 10-13; Susan P. Sloan, A It Works and I Can Do It!, 3, *Flame*, Spring 1981, 11; and Nanette Hardy, A Have You Heard the Good News, 3, *Flame*, Summer 1981, 6.

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⁸¹ Charles R. Beach, "Laborers into His Harvest," *The Lighted Pathway*, March 1957, 10; and Charles R. Beach, "I Remember the Church of God Lay Witnessing Movement," *Church of God Evangel*, June 10, 1985, 8.

⁸² Charles R. Beach and Leonard C. Albert, *Men's Fellowship Lay Coordinator's Manual* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Church of God General Department of Evangelism and Home Missions, 1980), v.

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⁸⁵ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, def. ed., 339-401.

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⁸⁸ Esdras Betancourt, "Hispanic Strategy," in *Church Ministries Conference Manual*, January 8-10, 1998, Cleveland, Tennessee, n.p.; and Esdras Betancourt, telephone interview by author, January 15, 1998, Cleveland, Tennessee.