



Churches *of* God

General Conference

EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

# Pastor Orientation

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# Churches of God

General Conference  
EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Welcome to one of the greatest missions anyone could accept. Your calling to serve a local congregation as their pastor will be challenging, but will also bring you incredible joy, peace and contentment as you see people grow in their Christian maturity. Additionally, the depth of your personal understanding and discipline will also grow as you invest in further study, prayer and devotion to Jesus Christ.

More than 2,000 years ago, our Lord set his Church into motion. He commissioned His followers to go and make disciples who will in turn make more disciples. The brilliance of Jesus' earthly ministry was a plan that would sustain the Church throughout the ages. A plan where one generation teaches the next to carry on the mission. As you begin your next ministry assignment, the call handed down from Jesus now falls on your shoulders.

Discipleship is not for the faint of heart. More than teaching, accepting the responsibility of leading a congregation means that you are prepared to do your part to lift people to maturity in Christ. You are accepting the responsibility of establishing meaningful relationships with the people entrusted to you by God. The task is challenging, and some good news is that you do not have to do it alone. In fact, the expectation is that you will not do it alone. Brothers and sisters throughout the ERC are walking the same path and are committed to supporting you in your calling.

This orientation manual is one example of how we are better together. The ERC provides many avenues of support to our pastors and congregations. We offer fellowship opportunities, continuing education programs, conflict mediation avenues, and many other services that can assist you as you live out your calling. The more you know, the more likely it is that you will call upon us. This manual is simply one resource designed to keep important information at your fingertips.

As you grow into your new ministry, please consider becoming an active part of the ERC. We invite you to join one of the many LEAD teams or ministeriums (listed in this orientation manual) that regularly meet throughout our Region. These groups offer support and growth opportunities beyond your congregation, yet still close to home. Should your calling include Regional leadership, we have several commissions and an Administrative Council that are in constant need of fresh leadership. Simply put, your journey with the ERC will be as interactive as you wish it to be.

The staff and leadership within the Region pray for you regularly, and we are here to support you. Our goal is to prepare the next generation to carry on the mission established by Jesus so many years ago.

Please do not hesitate to contact your Regional staff as they are here to serve you!

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Church Health & Credentialing & Placement: Dave Robinson, 717.802.0345  
Pastoral Family Health: Colleen Shank, 717.951.9714  
Discipleship: Diane Hakes, 717.773.6055  
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## Historical Introduction to the Churches of God, General Conference

The Churches of God, General Conference began in 1825 because of the labors, revivals, and ideas of John Winebrenner, a German Reformed pastor who ministered in and around Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

During the late 1820's, Winebrenner came to theological conclusions about the nature and government of the Church, the importance of the regenerating experience of the new birth and the ordinances (Believer's Baptism by immersion, Lord's Supper and Feet Washing). He reaffirmed the belief that the Bible was the "only authoritative rule of faith and practice."

In 1830 he joined five other "teaching elders," or ministers, in central Pennsylvania in forming an "eldership" for the purpose of adopting a system of cooperation.

As Churches of God settlers moved west, they established new churches and elderships in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Michigan. By 1900 the denomination had spread to West Virginia, Maryland, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The California Eldership began in 1948. Since 2000, congregations have formed in New York, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

Churches of God periodicals, The Gospel Publisher (1835-1845) and The Church Advocate (1846-present), have played a key role in distributing information about and for the Churches of God.

Foreign mission work was established at Uluberia, India, in 1898 and at Bogra (now Bangladesh) in 1905. Members of Slovak descent started mission churches in Eastern Europe in 1922, but communist governments thwarted this effort. Project HELP was begun in Haiti in 1967 and a ministry to Navajos began in New Mexico in 1976. In 1994, ministry was launched in Brazil followed by new ministry efforts in Kenya in 2008. Throughout the 2000's, God has graciously opened opportunities to start ministries in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Honduras.

Findlay College (University of Findlay) was incorporated in 1882 and opened for classes in 1886. Winebrenner Seminary began as a graduate department of theology in 1942 and was chartered as a separate institution in 1960.

The name of the denomination has changed several times. First known as the Church of God, in keeping with Winebrenner's view that "there is but one true Church, namely: the Church of God." The phrase In North America was added by the first General Eldership in 1845. In 1896 the name was made plural: Churches of God in North America. In 1974 two changes were made. The phrase "In North America" was eliminated in recognition of the Churches of God members in India, Bangladesh, and Haiti. "General Eldership" was changed to "General Conference" in recognition that delegates were no longer limited to "elders." Thus, the name today is Churches of God, General Conference.

1                                   **THE CONSTITUTION & BY-LAWS**  
2   **Of the**  
3   **Eastern Regional Conference,**  
4   **Churches of God, General Conference**

5  
6                                   *Adopted by the Conference in Session April 18, 2018*  
7                                   *As amended by the Conference in Session April 22, 2024*  
8  
9

10   **CONSTITUTION – PREAMBLE**

11 We, the Churches of God in the eastern region of the United States, established by the  
12 providence of Almighty God, in order to further the work of the Kingdom of God in our midst,  
13 establish churches, provide for their welfare and carry on a cooperative ministry for the benefit of  
14 all our members, do hereby ordain and establish the following Constitution and By Laws.  
15

16  
17   **ARTICLE I – NAME AND AFFILIATION**  
18

19 The name of this body shall be the “Eastern Regional Conference of the Churches of God,  
20 General Conference”, a Pennsylvania not-for-profit corporation (hereafter referred to as the  
21 “Conference.”). It is a member Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference  
22 (Findlay, Ohio) and is subject to the constitution and governance of the said General Conference.  
23

24  
25   **ARTICLE II – MEMBERSHIP**  
26

27 **Section 1. MINISTERIAL DELEGATES**

28 All ministers credentialed by the Eastern Regional Conference (hereafter referred to as  
29 “ministers”) shall be members of the Conference. They shall be required to attend the regular  
30 annual meeting and any special sessions of Conference unless officially excused.  
31

32 **Section 2. LAY DELEGATES**

33 Each congregation recognized by the Conference as a member church shall annually choose two  
34 laypersons for the first two hundred (200) members of its congregation to serve as delegates to  
35 the Conference-in-Session. For each successive one hundred (100) members or major fraction  
36 thereof, the congregation shall annually choose one additional layperson to serve. All such  
37 persons selected to serve shall, except in the case of new congregations, have been members of  
38 the Churches of God, General Conference for at least three years.  
39

40 **Section 3. MEMBERS-AT-LARGE WITH VOTING PRIVILEGE**

- 41       A. Any member of the Administrative Council who is not otherwise a delegate to the  
42       Conference shall be a member-at-large with voting privilege.  
43       B. The persons serving in the following Conference positions, if not otherwise delegates,  
44       shall be members-at-large with voting privilege: Treasurer, Financial Secretary, and  
45       Transcribing Secretary.

- 46 C. The presidents and secretaries of Conference-sanctioned auxiliaries and all Churches of  
47 God General Conference missionaries from this Conference shall be members-at-large  
48 with voting privilege.  
49 D. Conference ministry staff persons employed by the Administrative Council on full or  
50 part-time basis if not otherwise a delegate to the Conference shall be members-at-large  
51 with voting privilege.  
52

53 Section 4. VOTING PRIVILEGES

- 54 A. Every credentialed minister of this Conference shall be entitled to vote in the sessions of  
55 the Conference.  
56 B. All officially registered lay delegates shall be entitled to vote in the sessions of the  
57 Conference. Lay delegates serve for a period of one year, starting at the opening of the  
58 annual session of the Conference and continuing to the beginning of the next annual  
59 session of the Conference, when all delegates are seated anew.  
60 C. Advisory members of the Conference-in-Session are entitled to speak to the session, but  
61 do not having voting privileges.  
62 D. There shall be no right to vote by proxy.  
63

64 Section 5. Non-voting persons may be requested by the Conference-in-Session to sit outside the  
65 voting bar. Non-voting persons except those officially recognized as Advisory Members are not  
66 permitted to speak except when authorized by the Chair.  
67

68 Section 6. Each pastoral charge shall be entitled to one person, between the ages of fourteen (14)  
69 and twenty-four (24), to serve as an advisory member (without vote) to the Conference-in-  
70 Session.  
71

72 Section 7. Additional ministry staff persons from any pastoral charge may also serve as advisory  
73 members (without vote) to the Conference-in-Session if they are not otherwise delegates.  
74

75  
76 ARTICLE III – MEETINGS  
77

78 Section 1. The Conference shall hold at least one regular annual meeting.  
79

80 Section 2. The Administrative Council shall set the time and place of the annual meeting. The  
81 Administrative Council may call special meetings and may change the time and place of the  
82 meetings of the Conference-in-Session.  
83

84 Section 3. *Robert's Rules of Order*, newly revised, shall be the parliamentary authority for the  
85 Conference-in-Sessions, the Administrative Council and its commissions. Electronic or email  
86 votes are acceptable for the Administrative Council and its commissions.  
87

88  
89 ARTICLE IV – OFFICERS AND THEIR DUTIES  
90

91 Section 1. The Conference-in-Session shall elect a Vice President and a Secretary, each for a

92 two-year term. The Vice President will succeed to the office of President upon the completion of  
93 the President's two-year term which is completed at the conclusion of that Conference session.  
94 These officers shall be responsible for a variety of duties which shall include, but not be limited  
95 to, the following:

- 96 A. President: will formally ordain the candidates to the ministry as approved under Article  
97 X, Section 5; shall along with Executive Director, sign all certificates of license and  
98 ordination, and make appointments necessary to expedite the business of the Conference,  
99 conduct all Conference sessions and the meetings
- 100 B. Vice President: Will fulfill all duties assigned by the President, and conduct the duties of  
101 the President in the absence or incapacity of the President.
- 102 C. Secretary: Will be responsible for recording minutes of all Administrative Council  
103 meetings, oversee the recording of minutes at all Conference sessions, be responsible for  
104 any correspondence or documents presented to the Conference, conduct the roll call at  
105 Conference sessions, and prepare all tally sheets for elections. There are no term  
106 limitations placed on the office of Secretary.

107  
108 Section 2. In the absence of both the President and Vice President, the Secretary shall be  
109 authorized to fulfill the duties of the office of President until such time when the President or  
110 Vice President can resume their duties or an appropriate election takes place.

## 111 112 113 ARTICLE V – ORGANIZATION 114

115 Section 1. The Conference-in-Session shall be constituted at the first business session of the  
116 annual meeting (and at the opening of any special meeting) by the President of the Conference.  
117 The Parliamentarian(s) shall make any necessary recommendation to the President on all  
118 questions regarding eligibility and seating of delegates. The Administrative Council shall  
119 establish and prescribe rules, regulations, and official forms, including the certification of  
120 delegates and alternates, to facilitate and govern the recognition and seating of delegates and the  
121 constituting of the Conference-in-Session.

### 122 123 Section 2. NOMINATING COMMITTEE

- 124 A. A Nominating Committee of six persons shall be composed of two members chosen by  
125 the Administrative Council from its membership, and three members to be selected by the  
126 Conference-in-Session, all serving one-year terms. The Executive Director by virtue of  
127 his office shall serve as the sixth member of the Nominating Committee.
- 128 B. The Nominating Committee shall make nominations for each elective position in the  
129 Conference, nominations of delegates to the General Conference, and nominations for the  
130 three members of the Nominating Committee.
- 131 C. The Nominating Committee shall be responsible for ascertaining the eligibility and  
132 availability of all nominees for the respective positions, and shall prepare a printed ballot  
133 for use by the delegates at the Conference sessions. At least one-third more names shall  
134 appear for each office or position than the number to be elected, with the exception of the  
135 Conference Secretary, Churches of God Home Mission Council, Inc., and Doubling Gap  
136 Center, Inc. Blank spaces shall be provided on the ballot for additional nominees.

137  
138 Section 3. A majority of all votes shall be necessary for election except when electing General

139 Conference delegates, which may be done by plurality. On each successive ballot until such  
140 majority ensues, nominees shall be dropped as follows: Persons receiving less than fifty votes on  
141 the first ballot shall be dropped. On subsequent ballots the nominee with the fewest votes shall be  
142 dropped. In the event that two or more persons are tied for the fewest votes, they shall be  
143 dropped unless such action reduces the number of persons on the ballot below the number to be  
144 elected, in which case no names will be dropped.

145  
146 Section 4. All officers and Administrative Council members shall be chosen from the members  
147 of the Conference-in-Session and/or the congregations of the member congregations of the  
148 Conference. To be eligible in either case the nominees must have been members in good  
149 standing of the Churches of God, General Conference for at least three years. (*In the selection of*  
150 *an Executive Director see By-Laws Article III, Section 1.*)

151  
152 Section 5. GENERAL CONFERENCE DELEGATES

- 153 A. Ministerial delegates to the General Conference as determined by the General Conference  
154 Constitution shall be elected from the members of the Conference who have been  
155 credentialed according to the standards of the General Conference for at least three  
156 consecutive years including the year in which they are elected.
- 157 B. Lay delegates to the General Conference as determined by the General Conference  
158 Constitution may be elected from the members of the Conference-in-Session or from the  
159 congregations of the member churches in this Conference. To be eligible in either case  
160 the nominees must be members of said local congregation for at least three years  
161 including the year in which they are elected.
- 162 C. The Administrative Council shall present nominations for youth delegates to the General  
163 Conference from any local congregation of this Conference to the Nominating  
164 Committee.
- 165 D. All delegates shall be required to attend all the sessions of the General Conference. They  
166 shall notify the Conference Secretary not later than thirty days before the convening of  
167 the General Conference regarding their ability to do so.

168  
169  
170 ARTICLE VI – ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

171  
172 Section 1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- 173 A. The Administrative Council shall be composed of eight (8) members elected by the  
174 Conference-in-Session as follows: four (4) credentialed ministers of the Conference, four  
175 (4) lay persons (lay persons must be members of a local congregation of the Conference  
176 for at least three years); the three officers of the Conference by virtue of their office  
177 (President, Vice President, Secretary), the Executive Director, and up to two (2)  
178 additional members-at-large selected by the Administrative Council from the Conference.  
179 All members shall be voting members of the Administrative Council.
- 180 B. Administrative Council members with the exception of the Executive Director will serve  
181 a two-year term. The Vice President shall be elected in even numbered years and the  
182 Secretary in odd-numbered years. Two credentialed pastors and two lay persons shall be  
183 elected annually. The two selected members-at-large need not be elected in the same  
184 year.



- 185 C. Persons elected or appointed to the Administrative Council will be limited to serving  
186 three consecutive terms with the exception of the Executive Director and the Secretary. In  
187 the cases of persons appointed to complete the unfinished term of another, if less than  
188 twelve (12) months remains in the unfinished term it will not be considered a term for the  
189 purpose the previous rule. If more than twelve (12) months remains, however, it shall  
190 count as a full term.
- 191 D. Vacancies in Conference offices shall be filled by the Administrative Council.
- 192 1. Upon a vacancy in the office of President, the Vice President shall assume the  
193 office. Any vacancies in the office of Vice President may be filled on an interim  
194 basis until the Conference-in-Session can act at its next regular or special meeting  
195 to fill the remaining Vice Presidential term.
  - 196 2. A vacancy shall exist when the Administrative Council officially declares such  
197 vacancy due to death, resignation in writing, habitual neglect of duty, or any other  
198 justifiable cause.
  - 199 3. Membership on the Administrative Council is a Conference office within the  
200 meaning of this sub-section.
  - 201 4. Vacancies on the Administrative Council shall be filled by a majority vote of the  
202 remaining members of the Administrative Council.
  - 203 5. Vacancies filled by the Administrative Council shall be for the duration of the  
204 term with the exception of the office of Vice President.

205  
206 Section 2. AUTHORITY

- 207 A. The Administrative Council shall be the corporation of the Conference and shall  
208 constitute the Board of Trustees.
- 209 B. The Administrative Council under this constitution shall be the successor to both the  
210 Administrative Council and Executive Committee of the previous constitutions.
- 211 C. The Administrative Council shall have authority over the work of the Conference  
212 between the annual sessions of the Conference.
- 213 D. The Administrative Council shall have authority over the appointment and work of all  
214 commissions, committees, organizations, and employees of the Conference. It shall meet  
215 as often as necessary to oversee the work of the Conference.
- 216 E. The Administrative Council shall be vested with judicial power in all cases under the  
217 Constitution not otherwise provided for and it shall be responsible for making final  
218 decisions in the recall of certificates of ordination and all other credentials.
- 219 F. The Administrative Council shall have the right to name qualified delegates to the  
220 General Conference if and when the list of officially elected alternates have been  
221 exhausted.
- 222 G. The Administrative Council has the authority to appoint and dissolve any special  
223 committees it deems necessary.
- 224 H. The Administrative Council has the authority to employ persons as needed and to  
225 terminate such employment following the procedures established in the employment  
226 agreements. If no such procedures have been adopted, the Administrative Council may  
227 terminate employment at any time for any reason.
  - 228 1. The Executive Director shall be selected by the Administrative Council. The  
229 Executive Director is directly accountable to the Administrative Council for the  
230 performance of his or her duties.

231 2. All employees of the Conference are accountable through the Executive Director  
232 to the Administrative Council for the performance of their duties. All employees  
233 of the Conference, except in secretarial positions, must be members of a local  
234 congregation of the Churches of God, General Conference.

235 I. The Administrative Council shall have authority to resolve any issue or question of  
236 interpretation regarding the Constitution, By-Laws, and any other conference policy.  
237

### 238 Section 3. RESPONSIBILITIES

239 A. The Administrative Council shall appoint commissions which shall carry out the program  
240 and ministry of the Conference. Each commission must be made up of at least seven (7)  
241 members, two (2) of whom should have been present at the most recent sessions of the  
242 annual Conference and one member of the Administrative Council who shall serve as a  
243 liaison with voting privileges between the commission and the Administrative Council.  
244 Each commission shall have a staff person relating directly to its work. The staff person  
245 shall not be the chairperson, and will be accountable to the Administrative Council.

246 B. The Administrative Council shall annually name the chairperson for each commission.  
247 Persons who are appointed to commissions as members will serve a two-year term. There  
248 is no limit to terms of service for commission work.

249 C. The Administrative Council shall annually appoint a Constitution Committee of at least  
250 three persons and designate a chairperson.  
251

252

## 253 ARTICLE VII -- AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

254  
255 Auxiliary lay organizations, defined in the Conference By-Laws and others which may be  
256 established, shall be in harmony with the Charter, Constitution, and By-Laws of the Conference.  
257 The Conference shall foster, encourage, and support the lay organizations of the Conference.  
258

259

## 260 ARTICLE VII -- SUBSIDIARY CORPORATIONS

261  
262 The following corporations and any adjunct corporations thereof are subsidiary corporations of  
263 this Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference: Doubling Gap Center, Inc .and the  
264 Churches of God Home Mission Council, Inc. They shall report to each Administrative Council  
265 meeting and to the Conference-in-Session in writing or by personal representative. All records  
266 (including financial records) and minutes of these corporations are subject to review and  
267 approval of the Administrative Council.  
268

269

## 270 ARTICLE IX – POLITY

271

### 272 Section 1. AUTHORITY.

273 The Conference has the power to:

274 A. Receive and issue appeals from the Administrative Councils (or their equivalent) of local  
275 churches; and to examine, approve, or censure the records and actions of said councils.

276 B. Condemn erroneous opinions which injure the peace of the Church.

- 277 C. Visit particular churches for the purpose of inquiring into their spiritual condition.
- 278 D. Examine and license candidates for ministry.
- 279 E. Ordain, install, judge, discipline, restore or remove ministers.
- 280 F. Resolve questions of doctrine and discipline.
- 281 G. Unite or divide congregations.
- 282 H. Form or receive new congregations.
- 283 I. Dissolve congregations or close churches.
- 284 J. Order in general whatever pertains to the spiritual and material welfare of the churches
- 285 under its care.

286

## 287 Section 2. MEMBER CHURCHES

- 288 A. Any group of thirty or more believers united together as a religious body or church,
- 289 subscribing to the polity, principles and doctrines of the Conference and the General
- 290 Conference, and adopting its own constitution as approved by the Conference shall, upon
- 291 request to and approval by the Conference, be received as a member Church of God in
- 292 full standing in the Conference. The church shall be entitled to all the privileges granted
- 293 by the Constitution, including representation in the Conference and the service of a
- 294 minister of this Conference. All mission churches established under the auspices of the
- 295 Conference are considered member churches.
- 296 B. Any pre-existing group of believers united together as a religious body or church willing
- 297 to support the polity, principles and doctrines of the Conference and the General
- 298 Conference shall, upon request to and approval by the Administrative Council, be
- 299 received as an associate member congregation in the Conference. The church shall be
- 300 entitled to the privileges granted by the constitution with the exception of voting at
- 301 Conference-in-Session. Members of an associated church body are not eligible for
- 302 election to Conference offices. The church may be served by a minister of the
- 303 Conference. Associate membership may continue for ten years during which time a
- 304 request for membership in full standing needs to be made or this status will be
- 305 discontinued.

306

307 Section 3. The policies and guidelines of the General Conference shall govern membership and  
308 other aspects of local church administration.

309

310 Section 4. An appeal of an action of the Administrative Council (or its equivalent) of a local  
311 church in matters of discipline and other difficulties can be made, provided such an appeal is  
312 made to the Administrative Council of the Conference within thirty (30) days after the judgment  
313 has been rendered by the Administrative Council (or its equivalent) of a local church.

314

## 315 Section 5. CHURCH PROPERTY

- 316 A. The property of member congregations in full standing in the Conference is subject to the
- 317 laws of this larger ecclesiastical body, i.e., the Conference, and in turn to the rule of the
- 318 General Conference. This three-tiered hierarchical structure represents a representative
- 319 form of government with delegates from all churches constituting the Conference-in-
- 320 Session. This presbyterial polity is further translated and confirmed below.
- 321 B. All church property shall be held by the elders or trustees of the local church or by the
- 322 local church corporation if such there be, in trust for the Conference. The existence of this

- 323 trust, however, shall in no way limit the power and authority otherwise existing over such  
324 property, so long as the local church remains a part of and subject to this Conference.  
325 (See also the General Conference Constitution, Article XI and Article XVIII)
- 326 C. In the event a church shall become extinct or cease to maintain an organization in  
327 harmony with the doctrine, customs, or polity of the Churches of God, its property shall  
328 become the property of the Conference.
  - 329 D. In the case of extinction by reason of the dispersal of its members, the abandonment of its  
330 work, or other cause, a local church may provide for the disposal of its assets to  
331 appropriate ministries and/or agencies of this Conference and/or the General Conference.
  - 332 E. When a church ceases to be in harmony with the doctrines, customs or polity of the  
333 Churches of God, this Conference may at its discretion dissolve that church. An appeal of  
334 such a decree of dissolution may be taken within thirty-days to the Administrative  
335 Council of the General Conference. Whenever a church is formally dissolved by this  
336 Conference such property as it may have shall become the property of this Conference  
337 and shall be used for such purposes or may be sold or disposed of as this Conference may  
338 direct.
  - 339 F. Should a congregation desire to withdraw from the Churches of God, General Conference  
340 for whatever reason, the current General Conference policy on church withdrawal must  
341 be followed.
- 342

#### 343 Section 6. CONFERENCE PROPERTY

- 344 A. As a member Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference, all property of  
345 the Eastern Regional Conference and its subsidiary corporations is and shall be subject to  
346 the rule of the General Conference. All such property is held in trust by the Conference  
347 for the General Conference. The existence of this trust, however, shall in no way limit the  
348 power and authority, otherwise existing over such property, so long as the Conference  
349 remains a part of and subject to the General Conference.
  - 350 B. In the event of dissolution of the Conference, the Administrative Council shall, after  
351 paying or making provision for the payment of all liabilities of the corporation, dispose of  
352 all remaining assets under the provisions of Section 501 (c.3.) of the Internal Revenue  
353 Code of 1986, to be used exclusively for charitable purposes.
  - 354 C. Under no circumstances shall any assets be distributed upon dissolution to any directors,  
355 officers, employees, or individual or group of individuals of the corporation.
  - 356 D. Nothing herein shall be construed to affect the disposition of property and assets held by  
357 the Conference in trust under any other condition or subject to any executory or special  
358 limitation. Any such property upon dissolution of the Conference shall be transferred in  
359 accordance with the trust, condition or limitation imposed thereon.
- 360

#### 361 Section 7. NO ACTIVITIES VIOLATING THE INTERNAL REVENUE CODE

- 362 A. The Conference is organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes. No part of  
363 the net earnings of the Conference shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its  
364 officers or other private persons, except that the Conference shall be authorized and  
365 empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments  
366 and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in this constitution.
- 367 B. The Conference does not, and shall not, carry on any other activities not permitted to be  
368 carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501 (c.3.)

369 of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code,  
370 or (b) by a corporation, contributing to activities which are deductible under section 170  
371 (c.2.) of the Internal Revenue Code or the corresponding provision of any future federal  
372 tax code.

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## ARTICLE X –MINISTERS

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Section 1. Original jurisdiction in relation to ministers belongs to the Conference.

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Section 2. The church membership and responsibilities of the minister shall be in accord with  
General Conference policies and guidelines. The pastor shall be in charge of all worship services  
and ceremonies conducted in the Church, unless otherwise mutually agreed. The senior  
pastor/lead pastor shall be responsible for whoever occupies the pulpit.

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Section 3. Any minister belonging to the Conference who refuses to carry out an order or  
resolution thereof shall be liable to a charge of insubordination before the Conference.

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Section 4. Procedures for resolving controversies shall be in accord with Eastern Regional  
Conference and General Conference policies and guidelines.

390  
391

Section 5. Credentials for pastoral ministry include provisional license, annual license, and life  
ordination and shall be issued in accordance with General Conference standards.

392  
393  
394  
395

A. If no General Conference standards exist, the commission shall have the authority to  
recommend credentials and appropriate standards and guidelines to the Administrative  
Council for approval. Modifications to General Conference standards must be approved  
by the Administrative Council and the General Conference.

396  
397  
398  
399

B. Credentials for non-pastoral church vocations shall be issued in accordance with existing  
General Conference standards. If no General Conference standards exist, the commission  
shall have the authority to recommend credentials and appropriate standards and  
guidelines to the Administrative Council for approval.

400  
401

C. Candidates for license and ordination must be able to respond affirmatively to the  
following questions, which shall be asked during the annual ordination service:

402  
403  
404  
405

1. Do you believe that in seeking the office of the Christian ministry you are influenced  
by a sincere love for God and your desire to promote His glory and the salvation of men?  
2. Do you believe that the doctrines of the Word of God as taught by the Churches of  
God, General Conference are correct and true?

406  
407  
408  
409

3. Are you willing to subscribe to these doctrines, to teach them, and to defend them  
against every attempt to minimize their value, guarding against those things which cause  
division in the church, and dedicating your powers to building the church you serve as  
pastor?

410  
411  
412  
413

4. Do you promise to fully cooperate and carry out all the rules and regulations, and  
support all the agencies and enterprises of the Conference and the General Conference?  
5. If for any cause the Conference should deem it proper to recall your certificate of  
ordination, do you promise to deliver the same upon official request?

414

6. Should you determine that you can no longer publicly affirm the doctrines of the

415 Churches of God or fully adhere to the authority of the Churches of God, will you  
416 voluntarily surrender your credentials and resign your pastorate?  
417

418  
419 **ARTICLE XI – CONSTRUCTION**  
420

421 Section 1. This document shall be interpreted in accordance with Pennsylvania law.  
422

423 Section 2. In this document the word he is intended to refer to he or she.  
424

425  
426 **ARTICLE XII –AMENDMENTS**  
427

428 Section 1. Any amendment or revision to the Constitution shall be referred without debate to the  
429 Committee on Constitution for study, and the Committee shall present its report and  
430 recommendations at a subsequent meeting of the Conference-in-Session.  
431

432 Section 2. This Constitution may be altered or amended by a two-thirds vote of a quorum of  
433 Conference-in-Session. A quorum is the majority of the number of delegates officially registered  
434 for the annual session of the Conference. All members shall be required to vote, unless properly  
435 excused for good and sufficient reason.  
436  
437

438 **BY-LAWS**  
439

440  
441 **ARTICLE I – MEETINGS**  
442

443 The regular annual meeting of the Conference shall be held during the second quarter of the  
444 calendar year at such a place as may be agreed upon from time to time, for the transaction of  
445 such business as properly pertains to ecclesiastical bodies.  
446

447 **ARTICLE II – COMMISSIONS**  
448

449 **Section 1. THE CHURCH HEALTH COMMISSION**

450 The mission of this commission shall be to oversees the advancement and development of church  
451 health in the Eastern Regional Conference. The commission will seek to resource churches,  
452 pastors and leaders with best practices for ministry and church development. The Commission  
453 shall have authority to set guidelines and policies to further define and execute its mission,  
454 subject to the approval of the Administrative Council.  
455

456 **Section 2. THE PASTORAL FAMILY HEALTH COMMISSION.**

457 This commission will seek to improve the effectiveness and health of pastoral leaders in the  
458 Conference. The Pastoral Family Health Commission will seek to encourage and develop pastors  
459 for effective ministry through pastoral care and counsel, resourcing, mentoring and coaching and

460 if needed professional counseling. The Commission shall have authority to set guidelines and  
461 policies to further define and execute its mission, subject to the approval of the Administrative  
462 Council.

463  
464 Section 3. THE DISCIPLESHIP COMMISSION

465 This commission will seek to help churches multiply disciples, leaders, ministries, and churches.  
466 The Commission will oversee church planting as well as efforts for multiplication through our  
467 established churches. The Commission shall have authority to set guidelines and policies to  
468 further define and execute its mission, subject to the approval of the Administrative Council.

469  
470 Section 4. THE CREDENTIALING AND PLACEMENT COMMISSION

471 This commission will seek to work with people sensing a call to ministry, oversee their  
472 development and work to place them in ministry. The Commission will serve as the body for  
473 credentialing, both licensing and ordination for all pastors. The Commission will further work  
474 with the local church in placing pastors in ministry. The Commission shall have authority to set  
475 guidelines and policies to further define and execute its mission, subject to the approval of the  
476 Administrative Council.

477  
478 Section 5. THE EDUCATION COMMISSION

479 This commission provides educational oversight and resources aligned with the ERC strategic  
480 plan and mission. The commission has responsibility for ensuring the needs for educating unto  
481 mission within the ERC are discovered and resourced. This includes: Working with all  
482 commissions to develop a culture of learning/educating unto mission. Cultivate educational  
483 opportunities directly or through partnerships, that promote Biblical knowledge, application, and  
484 readiness for ministry in every area/expression of calling. Working with Credentialing and  
485 Placement Commission to establish educational standards for credentialing within the region.  
486 Working in conjunction with Discipleship Commission to resource the discipleship needs of the  
487 ERC. To raise the level of Biblical understanding and application for all persons connected with  
488 the ERC. The Commission shall have authority to set guidelines and policies to further define  
489 and execute its mission, subject to the approval of the Administrative Council.

490  
491

492 ARTICLE III -- AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

493  
494

Section 1. THE CHURCHES OF GOD WOMEN'S MINISTRIES (CGWM)

- 495 A. The CGWM shall further the work of the Churches of God by uniting the women of the  
496 Churches of God in spiritual fellowship, with a program of evangelism, prayer,  
497 education, giving and service.
- 498 B. It shall effect its own organization, elect officers, and conduct its affairs as provided for  
499 in its Constitution. The President and Secretary shall be members-at-large of the annual  
500 Conference-in-Session to which they shall report. The President and Secretary shall be  
501 advisory members of the Administrative Council to which they shall report at least twice  
502 a year.
- 503 C. The Conference CGWM shall maintain a close relationship with the General Conference  
504 CGWM and relate to interdenominational women's work.

505

506 Section 2. THE CHURCHES OF GOD ADULT LIFE FELLOWSHIP (ALF)

- 507 A. The ALF shall further the work of the Kingdom of God by uniting the senior adults of the  
508 Churches of God in this Conference in a program of worship, fellowship, and service.
- 509 B. It shall effect its own organization, elect officers, and conduct its affairs as provided for  
510 in its constitution. The President and Secretary shall be members-at-large of the annual  
511 Conference-in-Session to which they shall report. The President and Secretary shall be  
512 advisory members of the Administrative Council to which they shall report at least twice  
513 a year.
- 514 C. The Conference ALF shall maintain a close relationship with the General Conference  
515 CGSLF and relate to interdenominational senior life work.
- 516
- 517

518 ARTICLE IV -- STAFF POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

519 Section 1. The Executive Director shall be selected by the ERC Administrative Council. When a  
520 vacancy occurs in the office of the executive director for any reason

- 521 1. The Administrative Council shall appoint a search committee of at least three people to  
522 find a replacement candidate to be presented to the Administrative Council for approval.
- 523 2. The Administrative Council shall appoint an interim executive director to serve a period  
524 not to exceed eighteen (18) months until the new candidate is selected.
- 525

526 Section 2. Position Description

- 527 A. The executive director shall, by virtue of their office, be a delegate to the General  
528 Conference and the chairperson of the ERC Conference delegation.
- 529 B. The responsibilities of the executive director shall include, but not be limited to:
- 530 1. Overseeing leadership development in the Conference by:
- 531 a. Modeling an effective, scriptural, and exemplary personal leadership style.
- 532 b. Promoting and seeking training that is need specific for Conference staff  
533 and local pastors.
- 534 c. Conducting annual evaluations of each Conference staff member.
- 535 d. Assisting in the identification of individuals from local congregations who  
536 have the desire and necessary skills to serve the Conference on the  
537 administrative council, commissions, and staff members.
- 538 2. Giving vision and direction to the Conference By:
- 539 a. Spending time regularly seeking God's will through Bible study and  
540 prayer.
- 541 b. Exhibiting an understanding of, and the ability to implement, the  
542 Conference's mission statement, strategic plan and goals, and the mandate  
543 to "Discover, Develop, and Deploy Disciples as Jesus commanded."
- 544 c. Communicating & promoting the Conference's direction and goals to  
545 local congregations and ministry leaders to bring greater unity.
- 546 d. Leading the Ad Council and relevant conference leaders in periodic  
547 review of the mission statement, strategic plan and goals, and the mandate  
548 to "Discover, Develop, and Deploy Disciples as Jesus commanded."
- 549 e. Keeping abreast of research in vision casting to better reach a changing  
550 world.
- 551 3. Daily directing the Conference staff by:



- 552 a. Overseeing the ongoing administrative responsibilities of the Conference.  
553 b. Working with the Administrative Council in the search for, hiring of,  
554 evaluation of, discipline of, and termination of Conference staff.  
555 c. Developing the Conference staff into a leadership team.  
556 d. Providing pastoral support for the Conference staff.  
557 e. Determining which Conference staff persons will regularly meet with  
558 Commissions.
- 559 4. Acting as spokesperson and representative of the Conference by:  
560 a. Serving as an officer of the Conference with authority to act in polity,  
561 financial, legal, and disciplinary matters.  
562 b. Serving as signatory on behalf of the Conference for all legal documents,  
563 including but not limited to deeds, mortgages, and bonds.  
564 c. Serving as a representative of the Conference to the larger church  
565 community.  
566 d. Serving as a spokesperson for the Conference to the larger church  
567 community and the community-at-large.
- 568 C. The executive director shall have authority to speak on behalf of the Conference, the  
569 Administrative Council, commissions, and committees thereof on matters of record.
- 570 D. The executive director shall be the legal officer of the Conference, and shall be the  
571 custodian of the charter, seal, deeds, Conference archives, and pastoral transfers. They  
572 shall provide, sign, and seal all certificates of ordination, license, and annual  
573 identification cards for pastors.
- 574 E. The executive director may serve as an ex officio member of all commissions,  
575 committees or task forces of the Administrative Council where not already serving as a  
576 member.
- 577 1. The executive director will serve as a voting member of the ERC Administrative  
578 Council.
- 579 2. The executive director will serve as a voting member of the Commission on  
580 Credentialing and Placement on the Credentialing Task Force.
- 581 3. The executive director will serve as a voting member of the Nominating  
582 Committee.
- 583 4. The executive director will serve as a voting member of the Standing Committee
- 584 F. The executive director will have a semiannual evaluation with a committee appointed by  
585 the Ad Council.  
586

### 587 Section 3. Position Qualifications

- 588 A. The required qualifications for the Executive Director:
- 589 1. Demonstrates Christian maturity in the following disciplines  
590 a. Possesses biblical knowledge consistent with a life of discipleship and  
591 spending regular time in God's word.  
592 b. Has an active and vibrant devotional life consisting of prayer and worship.  
593 c. Is an active member of a local church.
- 594 2. Holds a personal theological position that is biblical and compatible with the We  
595 Believe statement of the CGGC and the practices of the ERC.
- 596 a. Has taken or will take CGGC History and Polity.  
597 b. Understands our presbyterial form of government and will work within it.

- 598 c. Is or will become a member of an Eastern Regional Church of God.  
599  
600 3. Demonstrates personal integrity and good moral character, and evidences a life  
601 transformed by the gospel.  
602 a. Demonstrates the qualities of an overseer as outlined in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and  
603 Titus 1:6-9.  
604 b. Evidences an understanding of the fear of the Lord and knowledge of God  
605 in deliberations and decisions (Prov 2:5).  
606 c. Exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).  
607 d. Has a teachable spirit.  
608 e. Is able to be transparent and values accountability and being surrounded  
609 by a network of co-laborers.  
610 f. Has a mature self-understanding and can clearly articulate their calling.  
611 4. Has demonstrated leadership and relational skills necessary as outlined below.  
612 a. Is a strong communicator, able to speak with compassion and willing to  
613 listen to and receive criticism/advice (Col 4:6; James 1:19).  
614 b. Has a heart for the unity and community of God's Church (Eph 2:13-14;  
615 4:13).  
616 c. Will champion the current mission and vision of the ERC and CGGC  
617 (Matt 28:18-20).  
618 d. Has a vision for God's kingdom over and above the culture of the day  
619 (Mark 1:14-15).  
620 e. Demonstrates the humility commensurate with a servant of God (Eph 6:6;  
621 Phil 2:3-5).  
622 f. Is able to act firmly and decisively and also with kindness, bringing along  
623 others and equipping them for the ministry (Eph 4:12).  
624 g. Has experience with, or an understanding of, various types of ministry  
625 including but not limited to: full-time, bi-vocational, parachurch, creative  
626 expressions, co-vocational.  
627 h. Is a team player, able to lead and empower the staff, commissions,  
628 congregations, and conference.  
629 i. Understands finances and has an ability to work with budgets.  
630 j. Has taken conflict resolution training or is willing to pursue such training.  
631 B. The preferred qualifications of the Executive Director: Has been a faithful, ordained  
632 pastor in the Churches of God, General Conference for at least 5 years.  
633

## 634 Section 2. GUIDING ACTIONS CONCERNING STAFF/STAFFING

- 635 A. All positions with the exception of the Executive Director will be implemented at the  
636 direction of the Eastern Regional Conference based on funds available.  
637 B. All job descriptions for all positions except for Executive Director will be maintained in  
638 an Office Policy and Personnel Manual.  
639

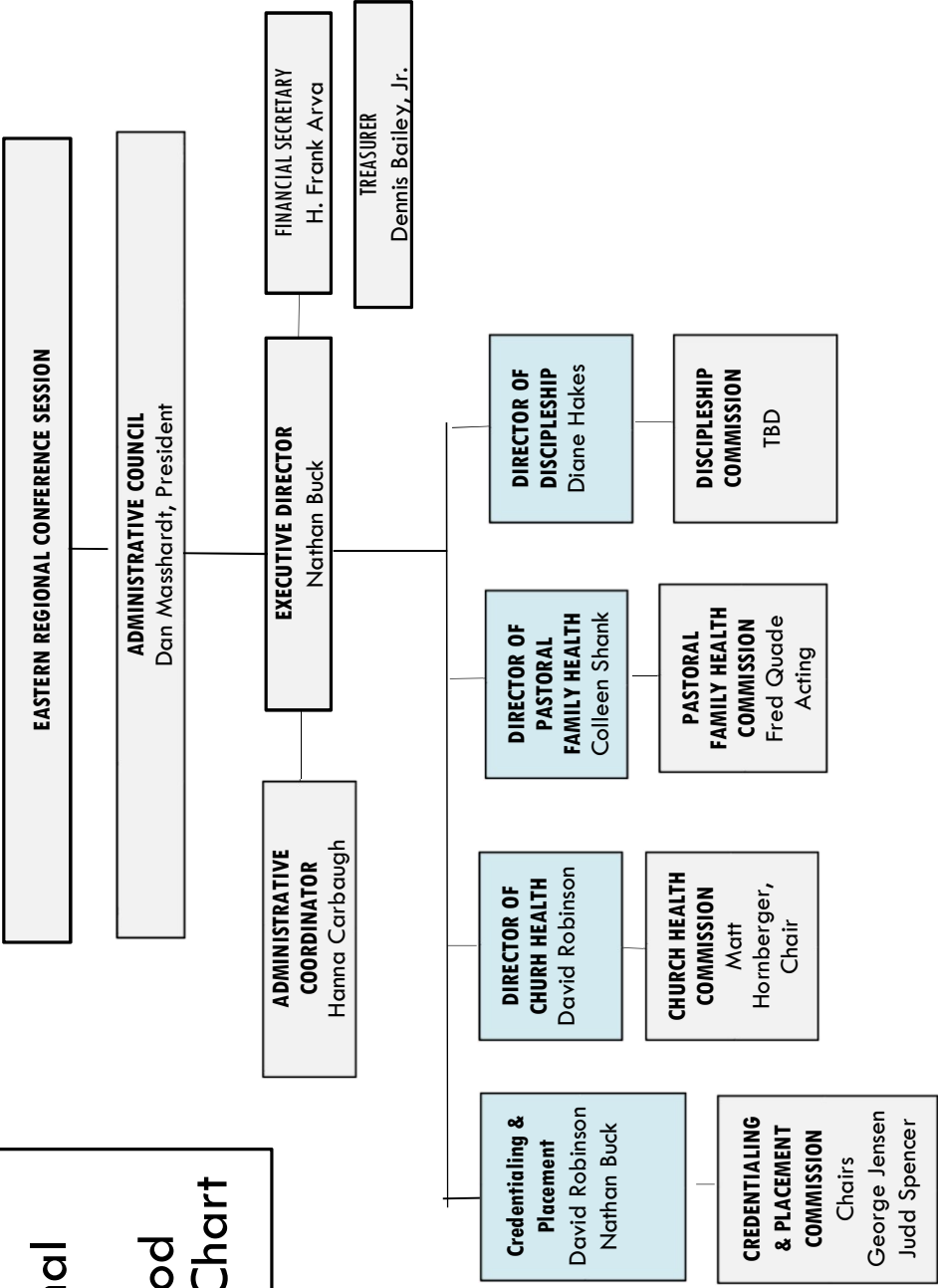
## 640 ARTICLE V – AMENDMENTS

641 Section 1. Any amendment or revision to the By-laws shall be referred without debate to the  
642  
643

644 Committee on Constitution for study, and the Committee shall present its report and  
645 recommendations at a subsequent meeting of the Conference-in-Session.

646  
647 Section 2. These By-laws may be altered or amended by a plurality of votes of the Conference-  
648 in-Session. A quorum is the majority of the number of delegates officially registered for the  
649 annual session of the Conference. All members shall be required to vote, unless properly excused  
650 for good and sufficient reason.

# Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God Organization Chart



## Expectations of Pastors

- Study the Word of God
- Be a person of prayer. Be in regular communication with God through listening and speaking.
- Prioritize your family.
- Value being with God over doing for God.
- Seek His Kingdom mission and vision for those you lead.
- Love God ... Love Others. Give your best to God by glorifying God in everything you say and do. (Col. 3:17).
- Be a Disciple Maker. Discover those under your care who need discipled. Through the Holy Spirit, develop them to be all they were created to be, and deploy them to their calling.
- Observe a Sabbath
- Integrity in preaching the Word.
- Be a life-long learner.

## Conference Expectations

- Be in community with other pastors and leaders. Connections can come through mentoring, lead teams, ministeriums, etc. Ministry is hard and in community you will feel less isolated and alone. It is the Conference's desire to see you survive and thrive.
- Attend annual Conference Sessions. The Conference Constitution states: *All ministers credentialed by the Eastern Regional Conference (hereafter referred to as "ministers") shall be members of the Conference. They shall be required to attend the regular annual meeting and any special session of the Conference unless officially excused.*
- You are responsible for what is said in the pulpit
- Promote Conference activities.
- If you feel that you are being called to another ministry, contact Dave Williams, [dave@ercog.org](mailto:dave@ercog.org), before tendering your resignation.
- If you desire to retire from ministry, please contact Dave Robinson, [daver@ercog.org](mailto:daver@ercog.org), six months prior to your retirement to begin the retirement process.

- Feel free to contact Pastoral Family Health, Colleen Shank, [colleen@ercog.org](mailto:colleen@ercog.org), to talk about retirement options and procedures before you formally retire or resign.

## Healthy Habits for a Lifetime of Ministry

Each year at our annual conference, we recognize pastors who are celebrating milestones in ministry. Some are celebrating 25 years, 40 years, and some 50 years or more. If you could gather all those pastors in one room and ask them the questions, “What is the key to a lifetime of ministry?”. The answers you would receive would be of infinite value. Ministry is not a sprint; it is a marathon. The healthy habits you develop as you begin your ministry can enable you to enjoy a lifetime of Christian service.

Think for a moment – what do you want others to remember about your ministry after you are gone?

We want to encourage you to consider the following ten principles. They are healthy insights into ministry that if embraced could enable you to have a long and blessed pastoral career. These insights are gleaned from practical experience but also from the book “*Pastoral Grit*” by Craig Brian Larson.

### Healthy Habits for a Lifetime of Ministry

1. **Preach the Gospel to yourself daily** – There is no more wonderful truth than the Gospel. Preach it to yourself daily. Recite John 3:16 and insert your name in the place of “world.” Heed Paul’s counsel to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Live in the Gospels and celebrate daily that you are fearfully and wonderfully saved.
2. **Remember you can influence but you cannot control** – Pastoral ministry has limits. You cannot make someone believe. You partner with the Holy spirit. Note Jesus’ use of farming analogies to show that the farmer can influence but not force the growth of the plant.
3. **Any growth in righteousness is of infinite value** – Paul knew this and this knowledge was the engine of his pastoral work. “We proclaim him,” he said, “admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all energy which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:28). How valuable is the hard work pastors invest in others to produce even “small” gains in obedience to the will of God?
4. **Ministry is measured in many ways** – There is more happening in our churches than mere numbers. We have to stop measuring and comparing churches and pastors and start counting conversations and opportunities to be Christ to others. We would be wise to measure the health of our churches and the effectiveness of our ministry by the fruit of the spirit evidenced in the lives of those we serve.
5. **Spiritual ministry requires faith from beginning to end** – We need to delight in those seasons of life that are stretching. We need to remember Paul’s counsel to a young pastor Timothy to endure hardship. As we follow God’s leading, much of the journey will be by faith and not by sight.
6. **Spiritual seeds have enduring power** – God’s Word has power long after we sow it. Sow the seeds and patiently, prayerfully watch God work on a person’s conscience. That’s what Paul meant when he said ‘by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God’ (2 Cor. 4:2).

7. **Spiritual ministry is a mixture of muddle and glory** – there are seasons to ministry and many times ministry seems to be more mistakes and frustrations than real life change. Be reminded that the next spiritual breakthrough could be moments away. Keep in mind that in the spiritual realm when progress appears slowest, Kingdom movement is actually occurring.
8. **Each step people make in God's direction should be celebrated** – Celebrate weekly all that God is doing in the lives of your people. Celebrate answers to prayer, ministries that are happening, milestones in marriages or education, births, deaths, etc.
9. **Serve in your "sweet spot"** – It's been said that there is less than a ¼ inch on a baseball bat that a baseball needs to strike in order to be a homerun! It is called the sweet spot. Ministry should be done in your sweet spot. You should be serving in your gifts in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.
10. **Be genuine** – Nothing will undermine your ministry faster than being unauthentic. Be the best you that you can be. Don't try to be like someone else. Be what God called you to be. God's called you to ministry to serve. Use the way He has made you along with your experiences, education, and passion to genuinely serve Christ and His Church.

“When I minister genuinely, everything within me supports the effort. When I minister from my core self, I do so with strength and great effectiveness. When I am authentic, I can stand and stay with a sense of stability and integrity. I become a person of truth through whom the God of truth can flow. Only when I am authentic can I persevere with spiritual vitality – strong to the finish.”

-Craig Brian Larson, *"Pastoral Grit"*, page 171



## **Annual Conference, Ministeriums, & Lead Team Participation**

It is possible to view participation within the church and the conference as a business. Such a viewpoint has its difficulties especially matching it up with scripture. A more biblical view is that of being in a family. We have a similar blood line and we want to gather to share the story, meals and life. As we gather we have a common heritage which bonds us together in the good time and the bad.

As the Churches of God we have an annual family gathering called the annual conference. The constitutional expectation is for you to be present, it is part of being in the family. Yes, we conduct business there, but so much more. It is a time for worship, it is a time of fellowship, it is a time for learning. We want you to share in the story of how God has worked in and through us during the past year and to discover how we see God deploying us in the future.

Annual gatherings are not enough to keep us rooted together. This is why we have local ministeriums and Lead Teams. Leadership is hard. Leadership can be lonely and discouraging. We have the greatest story ever told, yet we have an enemy who wants us to be distracted, discouraged and defeated. It is not always wise to lay all of these burdens at the feet of a spouse or other leaders within the church. There is benefits to having confidants who have walked a mile in your shoes. Our expectation is for you to participate in some group that includes other pastors. We have intentionally formed such groups feel free to ask about one in your area. You may also form other informal group with other pastors within or outside of the region. Being with other pastors will help you be developed into the pastor God has called you to be.

**Ministeriums** are generally monthly gatherings to connect with other pastors and/or leaders to share the joys and concerns of ministry. Some ministeriums have teaching moments. Some ministeriums center around a shared meal while connecting to one another for encouragement.

**Lead Teams** meet regularly for teaching, encouragement, fellowship and accountability.

Please see the current offering of groups available on the next page provided.

**Lead Teams, Prayer Breakfasts & Ministeriums**  
**(updated 3/2025)**

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**Lead Teams:**

Northwest  
3rd Tuesday of the Month, 9am Meets  
at Altoona 4th Street COG 2010 4th  
Street, Altoona, PA 16601 Contact: Lew  
Button  
814.215.9445

West Shore  
4th Wednesday of the month,  
9:30a  
Contact: Stef DiFrancesco  
717.991.1272

Harrisburg  
2nd Thursday of the Month, 9a  
Meets at Marysville Diner  
510 S. State Road, Marysville, PA 17053  
Contact: Mark Haliday  
814.937.2085

Cumberland Valley  
3rd Monday of the Month, 9a Newville  
COG  
Contact: Ron Dull  
717.264.2644

Carlisle Area  
Contact: Dick Warner  
717.422.1076

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**Prayer Breakfast:**

Maryland Prayer  
Thurmont Kountry Kitchen  
17 Water Street, Thurmont, MD  
Contact: Howard Ruley  
301.514.2512

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**Ministeriums:**

Lancaster  
2nd Monday of the month, 8a Gus's  
Keystone Restaurant  
1050 W. Main Street  
Mt. Joy, PA 17552  
Contact: Colleen Shank  
717.951.9714

Cumberland Valley  
1st Monday of the month, 9am  
Various Locations  
Contact: Ron Dull  
717.264.2644

Northwest - See Lead Team Above

West Shore  
3rd Monday, Noon  
Enola Family Restaurant  
743 Wertzville Road  
Enola, PA 17025  
Contact: Colleen Shank  
717.951.9714

## Long Term Disability

For all full-time licensed/ordained pastors under the age of 65, the Conference pays for a long term disability policy.

Upon receipt of your signed contract, Frank Arva will automatically enroll you on the policy. The premium for this policy is paid for by the generosity of the tithing churches in our Region.

If you have any questions, please contact Frank Arva on [frank@ercog.org](mailto:frank@ercog.org).



## Medicare Supplement Reimbursement Upon Retirement from the Eastern Regional Conference COG

For all Medicare eligible retirees meeting 10 years of service within the Eastern Regional Conference, a reimbursement of ½ of the Medicare Supplement (or Advantage Plan) is given to the retiree. This WOULD include a prescription plan if appropriate. The Conference does not reimburse the retiree for the amount taken from their social security check for Medicare. This is a reimbursement of the supplement only.

If the retiree is continuing to work as an interim pastor (aka transitional specialist), the church he/she is serving should reimburse the retiree for this expense.

Upon the death of the retiree, the benefit transfers to the spouse of the pastor. If there is a financial need, the spouse may be covered prior to the death of the pastor with written notice of the need.

### Receiving Reimbursement

In order to be reimbursed, a copy of the supplemental insurance invoice must be given to the Conference Financial Secretary (currently Frank Arva). Quarterly a check for ½ of this premium is mailed to the retiree. If there is a change in premium (either up or down), it is the retiree's responsibility to provide a copy of this new invoicing to the Financial Secretary.

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact Frank Arva on 717.574.0447 or by email [frank@erccog.org](mailto:frank@erccog.org).

# Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God, General Conference, 2025 Pastoral Agreement Form (PAF)

This is a record of agreement between: \_\_\_\_\_

and their pastor \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## TERM OF SERVICE

The term of service shall begin on \_\_\_\_\_ and shall be for an indefinite time. Service may be terminated by:

- a) the pastor's resignation to the Commission Credentialing & Placement, after having obtained the counsel of the placement representative; or by
- b) the local church board's decision upon receiving counsel by the placement representative and approval by the Commission on Credentialing & Placement.

It is UNDERSTOOD that either party requesting termination SHALL GIVE 60 days WRITTEN NOTICE, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parties involved. It is REQUIRED that the following compensation agreement be reviewed annually by the local church and their pastor prior to December 1 and returned to the ERC office by January 1. Disability Insurance is based on the most recent contract on file for any full time pastor under the age of 65.

## COMPENSATION PACKAGE (See Guidelines for Pastoral Compensation)

1. Remuneration Total.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Cash Salary \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Housing Allowance \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Parsonage Rental Value \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Parsonage Expense Allowance \$ \_\_\_\_\_
2. Supplemental Benefits Total.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Health Insurance \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Pension (full 12%) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (.12 x line 1 above)
  - c. Housing Equity Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Social Security Allowance\* \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (.0765 x line 1 above)
  - e. Disability Insurance (Conference provides to age 65)
  - f. Life Insurance \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Malpractice Insurance Yes No
  - h. Workman's Compensation \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - j. Couples in Ministry Retreat \$ \_\_\_\_\_
3. Reimbursement for Expenses Total.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Travel \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Continuing Education \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Ministry Expenses \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **IMPORTANT PLEASE FILL THIS OUT**

To accurately calculate the Conference provided LT Disability Insurance, complete the following:

Are you:  Full Time

Part Time

If part-time, how many hours are you expected to work? \_\_\_\_\_

Credentials:  Ordained

Licensed

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

***NOTE:** The dollar amounts shown on this agreement are 'a not to exceed value' and there is no guarantee that the full value of the agreement will be given. This is an agreement between the local church and the pastor. The Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God is not obligated for nor guarantees any of the above contracted amounts.*

\*Social Security Allowance to a Pastor is a taxable benefit.

## NON-FINANCIAL BENEFITS -- (See Guidelines for Pastoral Compensation.)

4. **VACATION:** The pastor will receive vacation time of \_\_\_\_\_ week(s) per year.
5. **HOLIDAYS:** The pastor may have the following holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Easter Monday, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the pastor's birthday.
6. **SICK LEAVE:** (Thirty days annually) accumulated sick leave from previous years: \_\_\_\_\_. (*Maximum of 30 additional days may be accumulated.*)
7. **PROFESSIONAL LEAVE:** The church agrees to grant the pastor \_\_\_\_\_ week(s) for professional leave. The church needs to compensate the supply pastor for any Sunday(s) the pastor may be absent.
8. **SABBATICAL LEAVE:** Time accumulated towards a sabbatical: \_\_\_\_\_ weeks.
9. **DAY OFF:** It is understood that \_\_\_\_\_ will be the pastor's usual day off each week.
10. **PASTORAL CARE TEAM:** The Pastoral Care Team shall consist of: \_\_\_\_\_
11. **WEEKLY HOURS OF WORK REQUIRED:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Council President

MAKE THREE (3) COPIES OF THIS CONTRACT: Mail (1) ONE copy to: ERC Churches of God, 113 S. Second St., Wormleysburg, PA 17043 by January 1, 2025. Give one copy to your pastor, and keep one copy for your board/council.

## 2025 Guidelines for Pastoral Compensation

(Instructions to complete the Eastern Regional Conference Pastoral Agreement Form (PAF))

- The base range Total Remuneration for full-time pastors (See Guidelines–Pg. 5) is \$\_\_\_\_\_ \$32,000 to \$40,500.00 based upon a mutual agreement between the church and the pastor.
- Additional Considerations (For 2025 guidelines each factor is worth \$900.00)
- Experience \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - Add one factor for each year of accumulated pastoral experience.
  - For example, if the pastor has completed 10 years of pastoral experience, 10 would be multiplied by \$900. for a total experience factor of \$9,000.
  - The maximum experience factor may be 10.
- Education \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - Add one factor for each completed year of college, seminary, or post-graduate work at an accredited institution of higher education. Check with the pastor to determine educational factor or the Commission on Credentialing & Placement if assistance is needed in determining the level of education.
  - Factors for undergraduate education: Factors for graduate education:*
  - Completed 50% of MTI/PTI = 1                      At seminary (seeking M.Div.)= 5
  - AA = 2    MA = 6
  - Enrolled in diploma program = 2                      M.Div., BD = 7
  - Completion of MTI/PTI = 4                                      STM = 8
  - Seminary Diploma = 4                                      Ph.D., Th.D., D.Min. = 10
  - B.A./B.S./B.A.R.S. = 4                                      (with BA and MA/M.Div.)
  - The maximum education factor is 10.
- Responsibility \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - Add factors according to the following chart for levels of responsibility based on worship attendance. Circuits will need to combine their worship attendance numbers to determine their responsibility factor.

Worship Attendance	1-99	100-199	200-399	400+
Solo Pastor	1	2	3	5
Co-Pastor				
Senior Pastor w/ Associate (s)	1	3	4	5
Associate Pastor	0	1	2	3
Church Planter	2	3	4	5

Maximum responsibility factor may be 5.

- Location (Please see last page of this document.) \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - Add 1 to 15 factors related to the local cost of living.
  - This information is included in this packet. It is based on *Sales and Marketing Management* magazine annual supplement.
  - Maximum geographical factor is 15.
- Other considerations \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - The church may choose to add factors for ministerial effectiveness. Essentially this would be an acknowledgment for a job well done. Consideration might be given for increases in attendance or giving and quality service in areas of preaching, visitation, pastoral care, administration, etc. Generally this factor would be determined through an annual review process conducted by the elders or an appointed committee. The Commission on Credentialing and Placement as well as

the conference office can provide forms and help to conduct the evaluation process. In the event of a 10% decline in attendance or giving the church should contact the Commission on Church Health. Other concerns about ministry should be directed to the Commission on Church Health. The elders shall be responsible for these contacts. The maximum effectiveness factor may be 10.

**1. Remuneration Total:** Add all previous lines (Enter PAF Line 1)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Breakdown of Remuneration**

A. Total Cash Salary: Line 1 minus B through D (Enter PAF, line 1a) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*NOTE: Total of A through F needs to equal line 1 above.*

B. Housing Allowance (PAF, line 1b) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If the pastor provides his/her own housing, a housing allowance must be provided for the pastor. Only the lowest of the following factors may be used as a salary exclusion for income tax purposes: (1) the amount designated as a housing allowance by the church; (2) the amount actually used for housing and related costs. The pastor should request the amount to be designated as a housing allowance, and the church council must take official action to confirm the amount. This action should be taken for the coming year prior to January. The designated amount may be adjusted at any time with the agreement of the pastor and the official action of the board.

C. Parsonage Rental Value (PAF, line 1c) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If a parsonage is provided, it is part of remuneration. This line represents the local rental value of the parsonage. Normally, it should not be less than \$450 per month nor more than 25% of the remuneration total (Line 1).

D. Parsonage Expense Allowance (PAF, line 1d) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If a church provides a parsonage, a portion of the pastor's salary may be designated as a parsonage expense allowance. This is a tax advantage as long as it is actually used for expenses involved in maintaining the parsonage; such as tenant insurance, furniture, cleaning supplies, rugs, etc. The pastor will need to keep an accurate and complete record of such expenses to justify the allowance. This allowance may not be used with a housing allowance.

**2. Supplemental Benefits Total:** Add A through I below (Enter PAF, line 2)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

A. Health Insurance (PAF, line 2a) See current Conference Guidelines \$ \_\_\_\_\_

For pastor's enrolled in a qualifying group plan or in a Single Participant Plan. All other churches may not pay or reimburse their pastor for health insurance and must include all remuneration in cash salary.

B. Pension (PAF, line 2b) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

The pension is based on line 1; multiply line 1 by .12 (12%). This amount is not to be included as income on the pastor's W-2 so long as the plan meets IRS guidelines. The present Conference pension program is a 403b plan into which not more than 25% of cash salary (line 1e) may be added. It is strongly suggested that all pastors be involved in the conference pension plan. Generally the pension contribution may not be paid directly to the pastor. If this is done, it is understood to be taxable income in the year it is given. If this is done a waiver ([www.cggc.org](http://www.cggc.org)) should be signed by the pastor, the pastor's spouse and the elders of the church. The commission on church and pastor will provide waiver upon request.

C. Housing Equity Fund (PAF, line 2c) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If a parsonage is provided, a housing equity fund may be established through the General Conference Pension Fund. Contact the fund administrator.

This amount shall be up to 5% of the remuneration subtotal (line 1) or 2% of the tax assessed parsonage value. Essentially this is an addition to the regular pension contribution in order to provide funds for the pastor to purchase a home for retirement. As such these funds will be subject to the guidelines of the pension fund. In addition, the pastor may reduce cash salary and place additional funds into this account as long as the pastor follows IRS guidelines for deferred funds. Include any voluntary salary deduction by the pastor on line 1d of the Pastoral Agreement Form (PAF).

- D. Social Security Allowance (PAF, line 2d) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Since the pastor must pay 15.3% social security tax instead of the 7.65% most persons pay, the church is encouraged to give the pastor a social security allowance equal to ½ the pastor’s social security tax. Multiply line 1 by .0765 to calculate this allowance. This is a taxable income to be reported on the pastor’s W-2.
- E. Disability Insurance (PAF, line 2e) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 This coverage is carried on all full time pastors in the conference. Currently premiums are being paid by the Conference from Eastern Regional tithes and offerings. The amount of benefits is based on the most recent pastoral agreement on file at the time of need.
- F. Malpractice Insurance (PAF, line g) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 The local churches should contact their insurance agent to secure this coverage. Contact the conference benefit’s coordinator for more information. The premium should be shown on the PAF, line 2g.
- G. Workman’s Compensation (PAF, line h) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 By Pennsylvania law, the local church must provide coverage for the pastor under a workman’s compensation policy. The rate is based on payroll. If your church is in a state other than Pennsylvania, Contact your insurance agent for specifics or the Conference Treasurer for more information. If you are a residence of another state please check with the appropriate state agency. The premium should be shown on the PAF, line h.
- H. Other (PAF, line i) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Reimbursement for Expenses Total:** Add A through E below (Enter PAF, line 3)  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

To give the pastor a set amount of money per month or at any other interval is not reimbursement, but taxable income. Reimbursement requires the pastor to pay the expense and then submit appropriate documentation to receive payment from the church for expenses incurred. Such documentation must qualify under IRS guidelines.

- A. Travel Allowance (PAF, line 3a) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Auto expenses for church related travel should be reimbursed at the current level of allowance as set forth by the IRS guidelines. The church may purchase or lease a vehicle for the pastor/staff.
- B. Continuing Education, Books and Subscriptions (PAF, line 3b) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 The minimum amount for continuing education, books and subscriptions should be \$500.00.
- C. Couples in Ministry Retreat (PAF, line 2j) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 This amount is to reimburse the pastor for the cost in part or whole.
- D. Ministry expenses (PAF, line 3c) \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Such expenses could include, but are not limited to: meal costs that are related to ministry; clerical clothes; miscellaneous church purchase and ministry related purchases; and miscellaneous church office expensive. The church may choose to make available a church credit card for pastor.



**NOTE: Other income**

- Honoraria  
On occasion pastors may receive honoraria/income or bonuses for weddings, funerals and other services they render. It is understood that such income may be taxable income. It is the responsibility of the pastor to keep accurate records of such gifts and report all taxable income.
- Non cash income  
Benefits received in kind from the employer are considered income and should be reported on the appropriate tax forms. Such compensation basically includes any expense paid by the employer that benefits the employees and is not business related. For example, non-cash income might include such items as the personal use of a car provided by the church for ministry, or meal and lodging expenses paid by the church that are not ministry related.

**Non-Financial Considerations****4. Vacation**

The pastor shall receive vacation time each year according to the cumulative years of full-time pastoral or church related services. All licensed pastors serving full-time automatically receive at least two weeks vacation time per year. All licensed pastors serving under permanent license receive at least two weeks vacation time per year for the first seven years, and three weeks beginning with the eighth year of service. All ordained pastors receive at least two weeks vacation per year for the first five years after ordination. Those pastors serving for a period of five to ten years (after ordination) receive at least three weeks vacation per year. All pastors serving ten or more years since ordination receive four weeks of vacation per year. Additional vacation time may be given upon the mutual agreement of the church and the pastor. The local church will compensate supply pastors during vacation weeks.

**5. Holidays**

The pastor may have the following holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Easter Monday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the pastor's birthday. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the pastor may have the following Monday as a vacation day. Another day shall be given if a ministry emergency occurs on a designated holiday.

**6. Sick Leave**

The pastor shall be allowed sick leave of 30 days per year. It may only be used for actual sickness of the pastor or immediate family. Sick leave may be accumulated at a rate of 5 unused days per year up to an additional 30 days. (It would take 6 years to reach the maximum number of accumulated sick days.) In the event of family death or crisis, sick leave may be used. In case of sickness beyond these provisions, the Commission on Credentialing and Placement will work with the local church to determine appropriate compensation.

Note: The conference provides a disability insurance program which is based upon the most recent pastoral agreement form on file at the conference office. Check with the conference benefit's coordinator for additional information.

**7. Professional Leave**

The church may agree to grant the pastor one to three weeks for ministry at Camp Yolijwa, evangelistic ministry, conference ministry, continuing education, consultation ministry, and other ministries. The church will compensate the supply pastor for any Sunday(s) the pastor is involved in these ministries.

**8. Sabbatical Leave**

The intent of a sabbatical is to provide a time of rest, recovery, renewal and/or continuing education for the pastor of the church to further the ministry objectives of the church, to enhance the personal ministry of the pastor, and to provide for physical, spiritual and relational renewal and refreshment. (It is understood that not all three intents will necessarily be fulfilled equally.) The church council must approve a sabbatical of the church.

A sabbatical may be granted to full-time credentialed clergy.

A sabbatical may be approved after the completion of ten years of full-time ministry at one local church.

For every two years a pastor serves, one week of sabbatical leave will accumulate but cannot be used until the completion of the tenth year of ministry at one local church. After that, five weeks may be approved upon written request by the pastor to the church council and the Joint Commission Chairpersons.

There could be a time when the pastor would request additional sabbatical time. The extended time must be approved by the church council and Joint Commission Chairpersons.

Internships and Interim service are not counted as part of the total years of service.

For the entire Sabbatical Policy, don't hesitate to get in touch with Colleen Shank, Director of Pastoral Family Health, [colleen@eccog.org](mailto:colleen@eccog.org).

## 9. Scheduled Day-off

The pastor shall be permitted 1 to 1 ½ days off per week. It is understood that Sundays are excluded under this provision. This day will be determined by the pastor in consultation with the elders. The congregation shall be notified of this time off. Emergencies may disrupt this scheduled day-off. If an emergency happens, a substitute day may be taken when available.

## 10. Personal Well-Being

The council shall annually designate a care team to minister to the pastor and his/her family. The team could be the elders or an appointed committee from the congregation. The team ought to meet with the pastor at least quarterly to monitor physical, spiritual and emotional health and to provide support and counsel regarding personal and professional concerns. The pastor's spouse may be included in the meetings if the spouse desires. If mutually agreed upon by the committee and pastor they may meet more often. An important part of the team's work should be intercessory prayer.

## General Guidelines

- **Full-time pastoral service is provided for the church when the pastor works at least 40 hours per week.** It is not suggested that a full-time pastor have a time card to determine these 40 hours. The pastor should provide the church with a monthly pastoral report. A conversation should be held between the pastor and the lay leaders to determine what type of report will be helpful for both parties. If help is needed in preparing such a report, please contact the Director of Church Health or your district representative of credentialing and placement. This salary package has been designed for full-time pastors only. To apply these salary and benefit guidelines to persons in part-time employment, the guidelines should be figured as if full-time. Then the part-time percentage should be applied to determine a fair salary and benefit package. This money may be distributed in a manner that is acceptable to the pastor and the church. For example, some pastors may want a cash salary and others may want these funds to use for additional benefits – i.e. housing, retirement, health insurance, etc. The Commission on Credentialing and Placement can assist churches to negotiate appropriate compensation.
- **If the church is not able to pay the full package as outlined in this document,** it is understood that the pastors may be free to seek outside employment. There needs to be a mutual agreement between the pastor, the local church and the Commission on Credentialing and Placement in determining appropriate compensation. If the pastor is not able or willing to work 40 hours per week, the total compensation package shall be reduced by a percentage equal to numbers of hours the pastor works. For example, if the pastor works 30 hours there shall be a 25% reduction in total compensation package.
- **If the church is receiving pulpit supply,** it is recommended the speaker should receive \$135.00 for each service in which he/she brings a message. In addition to this fee, a travel allowance will be provided from the home of the speaker to the local church and back for each service and/or meeting the person attends. This travel allowance will be the rate as established by IRS guidelines. If assistance is needed in determining IRS guidelines contact the conference office. The church may determine a maximum amount for such travel, but once this amount is reached pastoral services may end until this amount is renegotiated. If the speaker is serving a yoked parish the individual churches may divide these amounts.
- **If the church is receiving intentional interim pastoral service,** it is suggested that the church and the pastor begin negotiations with the full-time package based on the pastor's experience, education, responsibility, geography, and the amount that was paid to the previous pastor of the church. Then determine the number of hours the church wants the pastor to work. Using the forty hours per week as the full-time pastor model, determine what percentage the pastor is to be compensated. I.E. – If the church wants 20 hours of work/service, the interim pastor would receive 50% compensation. This money may be distributed in a manner that is acceptable to the pastor and the church. For example, some pastors may want a cash salary and others may want these funds to use for additional benefits – i.e. housing, retirement, health insurance, etc. The Commission on Credentialing and Placement can assist churches to negotiate appropriate compensation.

- **If the church is receiving tentmaker/part-time pastoral services**, it is suggested that the church and the pastor begin negotiations with the full-time package based on the pastor's experience, education, responsibility, and geography. Then determine the number of hours the church wants the pastor to work. Using the forty hours per week as the full-time pastor model, determine what percentage the pastor is to be compensated. I.E. – If the church wants 20 hours of work/service, the tent-maker pastor would receive 50% compensation.
- **If a church is receiving pastoral services from a retired pastor**, it is suggested that a pastoral agreement be completed between the church and the retired pastor. This agreement should include a brief job description, the numbers of hours the pastor is to work and the compensation the retired pastor is to receive. Refer to the above mentioned guidelines for full-time pastors as a place to start this discussion. Some attention needs to be given to Social Security limits on salary for a retired pastor. It is suggested that a reimbursement plan be established so that ministerial expenses may be paid to the retired pastor without incurring additional taxes. If the retired pastor is being reimbursed ½ of his Medicare supplement by the Conference, the church is responsible for his Medicare supplement. The pastor must notify the Conference to discontinue reimbursement as well as to reinstate it when not being supported by a local church.
- **At least once every two years, the pastor should receive a cost of living (COLA) increase.** For 2025, it is recommended that this cost of living increase (COLA) be 3.5%. For further information and guidelines regarding Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), please visit <https://www.ssa.gov/cola/>.

The following list includes all counties in the Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God in which a Church of God congregation is located. Units are assigned based on the median household “2023 Effective Buying Income” for each county from Everence Federal Credit Union (<https://www.everence.com/resources/pastors-and-church-leaders/pastor-salary-guidelines>). To use this table, find the county in which your congregation is located. Write the number of units in the space provided under location on the first page.

**MARYLAND**

Carroll 15  
Frederick 15  
Washington 10

**MASSACHUSETT**

S Middlesex 15  
Norfolk 15  
Suffolk 15

**NEW YORK**

Allegany 9  
Bronx 6  
Erie 10  
Jefferson 9  
Kings 12  
Lewis 10  
Monroe 11  
Montgomery 9  
NY (Manhattan) 15  
Onondaga 11  
Queens 13  
Richmond 15  
Schoharie 11  
Steuben 8  
Washington 11  
Wayne 10

**VIRGINIA**

Prince William 15

**PENNSYLVANIA**

Adams 13  
Bedford 9  
Berks 12  
Blair 9  
Bucks 15  
Chester 15  
Clearfield 7  
Crawford 8  
Cumberland 14  
Dauphin 11  
Delaware 15  
Fayette 8  
Franklin 11  
Fulton 10  
Huntingdon 10  
Jefferson 8  
Lackawanna 9  
Lancaster 12  
Lawrence 8  
Lebanon 11  
Luzerne 9  
McKean 8  
Mifflin 9  
Monroe 12  
Montgomery 15  
Montour 10  
Northampton 14  
Northumberland 7  
Perry 14  
Philadelphia 7  
Schuylkill 9  
Snyder 11  
Sullivan 9  
Union 11  
York 13



# CLERGY HOUSING ALLOWANCE WORKSHEET

## METHOD 1: Amount actually spent for housing this year:

Down payment on purchase of primary residence	\$ _____
Mortgage payments on primary residence (PITI)	\$ _____
Home equity loan repayments (loan made for housing-related expenses)	\$ _____
Refinancing costs paid up-front	\$ _____
Settlement costs on a new purchase, i.e. real estate commission, escrow fees	\$ _____
Real property taxes (If not included in house payment)	\$ _____
Personal property taxes on contents of primary residence	\$ _____
Homeowner's insurance (If not included in house payment)	\$ _____
Personal property insurance on house contents	\$ _____
Umbrella liability insurance	\$ _____
Furniture and accessories	\$ _____
Appliances	\$ _____
Furnishings, art and decorative items	\$ _____
Decorator services	\$ _____
Lawn care, maintenance, equipment & gardening	\$ _____
Improvements/Remodeling	\$ _____
Repairs and maintenance	\$ _____
Pest control	\$ _____
Supplies for cleaning & care of home	\$ _____
Carpet cleaning services	\$ _____
Homeowner's association dues/condominium fees	\$ _____
Miscellaneous	\$ _____
Other	\$ _____

### Utilities:

Cable	\$ _____
Electricity	\$ _____
Internet connection	\$ _____
Natural gas/oil	\$ _____
Security system	\$ _____
Telephone (base charge)	\$ _____
Trash collection/recycling pickup	\$ _____
Water/sewer	\$ _____

**TOTAL UTILITIES** (repeat on line 3c below)

\$ 0 1a

**Total computed housing expenses actually paid:**

(1T)

0

## **Payroll for Pastors**

Payroll for an ordained or licensed minister is complicated. It is recommended that you seek professional advice from a qualified payroll specialist in order to have payroll properly processed. Ministers have a dual status by the IRS; i.e., you are considered self-employed for Social Security and Medicare and also an employee by other taxing authorities. Any time that a church pays the self-employment taxes for a minister, this is considered income to the minister. It is absolutely possible for the church to withhold all taxes for their pastor, but it must be done a very specific way.

The Conference recommends that churches withhold all taxes for their minister. Pastors are called to preach and teach and withholding for them is a help to them. It is recommended that the pastor agrees to have the church withhold.

If you need assistance in setting up payroll for your minister, please contact Frank Arva, Financial Secretary at [frank@ercog.org](mailto:frank@ercog.org).

## **Preparing Income Taxes**

It is recommended that you seek professional assistance when filing your pastoral income taxes. If you need a recommendation on who to seek for this help, please contact Frank Arva, Financial secretary at [frank@ercog.org](mailto:frank@ercog.org).

## *Church Treasury Financial Reporting*

Monthly financial reports should be prepared and given to church leadership and should also be made available to anyone who is interested in the financial position of the ministry.

Reports should reflect the following financial information:

- Income Received
- Expenses Incurred
- Asset Account Beginning and Ending Balances

Typically, the following reports would be provided:

- **Balance Sheet**: This report shows the Asset Account(s) beginning and ending balances as well as any fund balances (if you are using fund accounting) and liabilities (what you owe). This report gives an overall picture of the monies remaining after the expenses are posted.
- **Treasurer's Report**: This report shows where the monies have been spent as well as what income has been received.

## Basic Treasurer/Church Bookkeeping Information

Protection of His finances is a key ingredient to the health of the Body of Christ. In Luke 16 just before Jesus says, “You cannot serve both God and Money” (vs. 13), Jesus states in vs. 11, “if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches”. The word ‘trustworthy’ comes from the word ‘pistos’ which means a person who shows themselves faithful in the transaction of business, worthy of trust, able to be relied on. It is clear that our calling to administer the finances of His church comes with great responsibility. The finances must be handled appropriately and with utmost integrity.

Below are a few basic guidelines to help you in your journey. These are not exhaustive; they are to get you started. As He directs your path you will learn other pieces to help you in your administration of the church’s finances. A few websites you might find helpful are....

[www.churchlawandtax.com](http://www.churchlawandtax.com)  
[www.freechurchaccounting.com](http://www.freechurchaccounting.com)



## Bookkeeping Basics for His Church

### Υ Separation of Duties

One of the key components to internal controls of His finances is basically this...one person(s) **touches** the physical money and another person(s) **disburses** and accounts for the money.

### Υ Counting of Offering

Rotating teams of counters/depositors record and log the offering after worship. There should be a minimum of two unrelated persons counting and logging the income. The offering is then taken to the bank. Offering should NOT be taken to any individual's home. The deposit/giving report is then given to the Treasurer for entry into the bookkeeping system. The Treasurer (who disburses the funds) should NOT be part of the counting team.

If the Treasurer is tracking donations the donor information should be provided with the deposit information.

At no time should a pastor's name be on any church account. Pastors may receive as much information as they desire, but must be insulated from access to the funds at all times. This is a protection for the pastor. He/she is called to preach and teach, not count and disburse.

### Υ Disbursing of Church Funds

Documentation – evidence that any expense is a legitimate ministry expense is very important. We are obligated by the IRS to have in place an 'Accountable Reimbursement Plan' to be certain that any reimbursements given are not considered income. The Treasurer is the gatekeeper for accountability in how the church funds are spent. This responsibility is never to be used as a mechanism of control, but as a form of cooperation as we serve one another in love through sound financial principles and procedures. Basically, there needs to be a paper trail of expenses. Most items purchased will generate a receipt or invoice. These should be organized in monthly folders noting the check or electronic funds transfer (eft) receipt on the invoice. It is a good practice to have an invoice approval system in place.

### Υ Monthly Accounting

Each month the church account(s) should be reconciled with the bank statement.

Each month a report providing account balances for all church accounts, all liabilities incurred, and all expenses should be given to the leadership of the church. A complete monthly accounting of all the funds of the church is necessary to insure sound accountability.

**Υ Yearly Review**

Each year the church bookkeeping should be reviewed either by an internal or external committee. Those on the committee should be qualified to review the accounting of His finances and also provide a written report to the Administrative Council for review.

## Bookkeeping Software Suggestions

### Churchtrac

[www.churchtrac.com](http://www.churchtrac.com)

### Quickbooks

Quickbooks may be adapted for church use ; however, it must be kept in mind that this is a business software.

### Church windows

[www.churchwindows.com](http://www.churchwindows.com)

This software is tailor made for churches and covers everything necessary for handling the finances accountably.

# Supporting the Ministries of the Eastern Regional Conference

## Churches Tithe to the Region

### How did it come about that churches tithe to the Region?

Up until 1997, the Region gathered resources from its member churches in the form of apportionments; i.e., a set amount was asked to be sent in by churches based on their size. The leadership during that time did not feel that was biblical. A vote was taken to the Conference in Session and voted on by the membership to change the structure of giving to the Region. It was asked that each church tithe to the Region. The Conference in Session affirmed and approved changing to a system of tithing. Since that time, the LORD has always provided enough resources to meet the needs of the Region and beyond. We serve a generous God and when we move in faith with our resources we see Him provide in ways unimaginable.

### Why should churches tithe to the Region?

The Regional ministries are funded through a tithe from the local churches in the Region. Each local congregation prays and discerns what income they will tithe on to the Region. Some churches send the tithe to the Region weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Tithes support tuition for seminary students, planting of new churches, revitalizing existing churches, supporting ministers through long term disability for full time pastors, identifying disciples and helping them to become disciple makers, assisting with health insurance premiums upon retirement, education on accountable financial practices as well as generosity, leading ministries to understand our biblical mandate to discover, develop, and deploy disciples as Jesus commanded. The Conference is a servant to the local church.

50% of the tithe received stays in the Region, the other 50% is sent to the General Conference of the Churches of God in Findlay, Ohio.

We all know that tithing (whether individual or corporate) is founded in a faith-filled relationship with Jesus knowing that as we pour out resources, our faithful heavenly Father has resources adequate enough to meet our needs when we live generously.

The form to send in a tithe follows.

# FINANCIAL REMITTANCE FORM FOR EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE (ERC)

113 S. Second Street, Wormleysburg, PA 17043

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Church of God  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer  
 Check here if you are a new Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail

## TITHES

**Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.** - Malachi 3:10 (KJV)

What was your total income for this period?

A tithes (10%) of this amount included with this form

Dollar Amount	Income (Month / Quarter)

## HOSPITALIZATION

Pastor's Hospitalization

Church's Fair Share Hospitalization

(\$10/member to support retired Pastor's and Widow's hospitalization)

Dollar Amount	Income (Month / Quarter)

## OFFERINGS—DESIGNATED MINISTRIES

### ERC

Church of God Home, Carlisle, PA

Doubling Gap Center, Newville, PA

Church Planting

Other

Other

Other

	Details <i>(or circle Option given)</i>
	<b>General</b> or <b>Forever Caring</b>
	<b>General</b> or <b>Expansion Fund</b>

### CGGC

Winebrenner Seminary

University of Findlay

Other

Other

Other

Other

Other

Dollar Amount	Budget Ministries Booklet Code (Include Name and Code)
	WS2601
	UF2501

**Total \$\$ Included:**

**Check Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

Payments can be made by a single check payable to 'Eastern Regional Conference COG' or "ERC COG." Please fill out a copy of this form and send with check to the **Conference Financial Secretary** at the above address. For questions you may call Frank Arva, Conference Financial Secretary, at (717) 574-0447 or e-mail him at frank@ercog.org.

**CHURCHES OF GOD GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
**EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**BENEVOLENCE POLICY**

And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other. Acts 2:44

All believers were of one heart and mind, and no one felt that what he owned was his own; everyone was sharing. Acts 4:32

**Definition**

This benevolence fund is a monetary reserve kept in order to help the ERC Pastor and their family in need. It also, refers to an act of kindness or charity. A benevolence fund is used to help families with unexpected expenses.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to set forth the responsibilities of the benevolence fund and the guidelines for discharging those responsibilities. It is intended to cover most circumstances under which monies may be disbursed from the fund.

The Pastoral Family Health Commission has ultimate responsibility and accountability for the benevolence fund, and will make decisions to disburse monies from the fund.

**Guidelines for Disbursement**

**General Guidelines**

The benevolence fund is intended as a source of assistance to be used when an individual or family requesting assistance has explored all other possibilities of assistance from family, friends, savings, or investments. It is intended to be a temporary help during a time of crisis.

Assistance from the benevolence fund is intended to be a one-time gift. In unusual circumstances, the benevolence fund committee may decide to help an individual or family more than one time. However, under no circumstance is a gift from the benevolence fund to be considered a loan. No gift may be repaid, either in part or in full, in money or in labor.

## Criteria

An individual or family may make a request to the Pastoral Family Health Commission explaining the reason for the need of assistance. Assistance may be granted in the following areas, but not limited to:

- Lodging
- Food
- Clothing
- Medical expenses
- Funeral expenses
- Other

The Pastoral Family Health Commission has suggested the following amount of support in each category:

- |                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| • Lodging          | \$100.00 |
| • Food             | \$100.00 |
| • Clothing         | \$100.00 |
| • Medical expenses | \$200.00 |
| • Funeral expenses | \$300.00 |

### **Benevolence will NOT be approved for:**

- business investments, or anything that could be construed to bring financial profit to the individual or family
- paying off credit cards. Exceptions can be made when an individual has had to use credit cards to pay for a crisis or emergency (e.g., hospitalization, death, etc.)
- needs of individuals who are wanted by the law
- for paying fines as a result of breaking the law
- legal fees

- penalties relating to late payments or irresponsible actions
- private school fees or tuition

## **Procedures for Disbursement**

### **Source of Request**

A Request for Assistance form must be filled out by the person who is assisting the individual or family in need.

1. The request for assistance form must be submitted to the Pastoral Family Health Commission Chairperson. The Request for Assistance Form **must have** the following information:
  - a. Name of the individual or family requesting assistance
  - b. Address
  - c. Phone number
  - d. Reason for assistance
  - e. Amount of assistance
2. The Pastoral Family Health Commission Benevolence Committee will review the request and come to a decision.
3. The individual or family making the request will be informed of the decision.
4. If the assistance request has been approved a check will be written and disbursed. As much as possible, checks from the benevolence fund will be payable to vendors, homeowners' associations, etc., rather than to the individual or family requesting assistance.



**EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
BENEVOLENCE REQUEST FORM  
FOR ERC PASTORS AND THEIR FAMILY**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt# \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for Assistance

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Amount requesting \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that all the above information is true and correct.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Signature

Date Approved \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Approved \_\_\_\_\_

ERC Pastoral Family Health Commission Chairperson

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Submit completed to Colleen Shank, Director, Pastoral Family Health, 113 S. Second Street,  
Wormleysburg, PA 17043, 717.951.9714 Email - colleen@ercog.org**

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Approved 12/1/2020

**Commission Chair**

Fred Quade, Acting  
717.823.7670  
fmq1976@aol.com

**Commission Treasurer**

Marsha Quade  
717.823.7647  
mlquade2@aol.com

**Harrisburg NE District Rep.**

TBD

**South Central District Rep.**

Ray & Tress Duvall  
443.974.6350 (Ray)  
443.974.6349 (Tress)  
rbdjr@protonmail.com  
tressisjoyful@gmail.com

**South Central District Rep.**

Dan & Diane Thomas  
717.586.4353 (Dan)  
717.521.6682 (Diane)  
pastordthomas@gmail.com  
refreshyoursoul2018@gmail.com

**Commission Events/**

**Cumberland Val. Dist. Rep.**

Ada Myers (Tom)  
717.798.2470  
charlietater@Comcast.net

**Cumberland Val. Dist. Rep.**

Gary (Sec.) & Joyce Hornbaker  
717.552.6990 (Gary)  
717.658.3130 (Joyce)  
Visitation\_and\_discipleship@  
Shipfcog.org  
joycehornbaker@gmail.com

**Northwest Dist. Rep.**

Jon & Betty Jane Neely  
814.215.3001  
neelyjon@gmail.com  
bettyjneely@gmail.com

**Lancaster District Rep.**

Fred & Marsha Quade  
717.823.7670 (Fred)  
717.823.7647 (Marsha)  
fmq1976@aol.com  
mlquade2@aol.com

**West Shore Dist. Rep.**

Jonathan Bowers (Michele)  
717.609.7296  
pastorbowers14@Hotmail.com

**Colleen Shank**

Director of Pastoral Family Health  
717.951.9714  
colleen@ercog.org



# EAP Benefits At-A-Glance

WellSpan Employee Assistance Program (EAP) powered by Quest Behavioral Health  
When you or someone you love needs assistance, help is just a click or call away.

[QuestBH.com](http://QuestBH.com) | (800) 364-6352



## Professional Counseling

You and your dependent family members are each eligible for 3 free counseling sessions per contract year. (Your benefits renew October)

- Choose face-to-face or virtual
- Professional, confidential service

To access these services, call Quest at (800) 364-6352.



## Legal and Financial Resources

You and your dependent family members are entitled to:

- One (1) no-cost, 30-minute initial consultation (office or phone) per separate legal or financial matter with a network attorney or financial counselor.
- A preferred 25% reduction from the normal hourly rate if you retain a participating attorney or financial counselor after your initial consultation.

To access these services, call Employee Care at 888-254-8104.



## Elder Care Consultants

We offer one (1) phone consultation per calendar year, per family, with an elder care specialist. Topics include:

- Medicare & Medicaid services
- Senior transportation services
- Assisted living facilities
- Nursing home options
- In-home care services
- Alzheimer's disease

To access this service, call Senior Management Services at (717) 881-4674 and tell them you're a member of WellSpan EAP powered by Quest Behavioral Health.



## Resources for Everyday Living

The confidential website [WorkLifeServices.net](http://WorkLifeServices.net) offers you and your dependent family members a full spectrum of resources, including:

- DIY legal forms
- Financial calculators
- Webinars
- Health risk assessments
- Diet and exercise
- Mental and medical health

On your first visit, register for an account using our Company Code: **WSH-ERCCG**

Then you'll create a personal username and passcode for future logins.

ERC PASTORAL FAMILY HEALTH COMMISSION

PASTOR INFORMATION

PASTOR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor Cell # \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Pastoral License \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Ordination \_\_\_\_\_

SPOUSE NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse Cell# \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

ANNIVERSARY \_\_\_\_\_

HOME ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

CHILDREN/BIRTHDATE(S) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

CHURCH \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

IF YOU ARE NOT PASTORING A CHURCH WHAT IS YOUR MINISTRY WITH THE ERC

\_\_\_\_\_

## LEGACY JOURNEY INTERVIEW

A member of the ERC Pastoral Family Health Commission will conduct a Legacy Journey Interview. This will be a part of the pastor's departure from their church whether it is a voluntary or involuntary departure. This Interview will be conducted to see what wonderful things you and your family ha experienced during your ministry.

A member of the ERC Pastoral Family Health Commission will conduct the Legacy Journey Interview and will follow up in six months with the pastor to see how things a going.

## LEGACY JOURNEY

Pastor's Name:

Date:

Spouse:

Children

Church/Churches

Time in Service

(Affirmation)

What would you list as some of your notable accomplishments during this current ministry?

What did you find to be your most enjoyable aspects of ministry at this church?

What were some projects/ministries that gave you the most satisfaction?

How did your family adjust/fit into this ministry?

(Challenges)

We all know that pastoring a congregation is not always easy. What did you find to be some of the greatest challenges at this ministry?

If you had it to do over again, what would you have done differently?

DISCIPLESHIP

As you've heard, the Region has realized our failure to raise disciples who raise disciples.

In your former ministry, were you able to lead the Body to understand this command of Jesus?

If so, could you communicate any disciple that you feel has grown as a disciple under your leadership?

If anyone came to mind, are they now pouring into another disciple?

Can you name anyone at your former ministry, that you believe you saw something in them that God is calling them to greater leadership, a pastoral calling, a marketplace minister, or any other gifts that should be cultivated?

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Did you serve on any leadership role in the ERC?

What might you want to say to the person who will follow you?

What did you learn here that you will incorporate into your next ministry?

If you are going into retirement, how do you plan on using God's gifts and experience to add to the Kingdom?

How could the ERC, specifically PFHC better supported your ministry

How would you describe the congregation's relationship to the ERC?

Positive and fruitful?

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Neutral and different?

Negative and resentful? Why?

In what ways has the ERC been helpful to your ministry?

Not helpful?

What would you like to say to the ERC leadership?

Has it been clearly communicated to the congregation that your departure means that you will no longer be able to do ordinance ministry, weddings, funerals, etc. in that congregational context.?

If Retiring: I will be following up in six months to see how things are going for you and your family

Close with affirmation and prayer.

Interviewer(s)

## ERC PASTORAL FAMILY HEALTH COMMISSION

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Pastoral Family Health Commission exists to help pastors, pastoral staff members and their spouses and families experience health personally, spiritually, relationally, mentally and emotionally.

The Commission will seek to improve the effectiveness and health of pastoral leaders in the Conference. The Pastoral Family Health Commission will seek to encourage and develop pastors for effective ministry through pastoral care and counsel, resourcing, mentoring and coaching and if needed professional counseling.

The heart of the pastor and his or her family is the ultimate concern of the Pastoral Family Health Commission. Therefore, we intend to provide Preventative Care, Crisis Care and Restorative Care through the following means: counseling, support, intervention and restoration.

## CHURCHES OF GOD GENERAL CONFERENCE

### EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

#### SABBATICAL POLICY

The concept of sabbatical is rooted in the biblical concept of “Sabbath” which God modeled (Genesis 2:1-4a) and commanded (Exodus 20:8-11). In Leviticus 25:1-7, the Lord says that after the sixth-year people were not supposed to sow the fields or harvest a crop. The land was allowed to rest, and therefore, so were the people.

#### Purpose

The intent of a sabbatical is to provide a time of rest, recovery, renewal and/or continuing education for the pastor of the church to further the ministry objectives of the church, to enhance the personal ministry of the pastor, and to provide for physical, spiritual and relational renewal and refreshment. (It is understood that not all three intents will necessarily be fulfilled equally.) A sabbatical must be approved by the church council of the church.

#### Eligibility

A sabbatical may be granted to full-time credentialed clergy.

A sabbatical may be approved after the completion of ten years of full-time ministry at one local church. For every two years a pastor serves, one week of sabbatical leave will accumulate, but cannot be used until the completion of the tenth year of ministry at one local church. Five weeks may be approved upon written request by the pastor to the church council and the Joint Commission Chairpersons.

There could be a time when the pastor would request additional sabbatical time. The extended time must be approved by the church council and Joint Commission Chairpersons.

Internship’s and Interim service are not counted as part of the total years of service.

#### Application

The pastor shall submit a written proposal requesting a sabbatical to the local church leaders and the Credentialing and Placement Commission.

The pastor and his church council will work together to determine a timeframe best suitable for his or her sabbatical. A detailed sabbatical plan will be presented to the church council and the

Joint Commission Chairpersons at the time application for a sabbatical is made. Such plan should be presented at least six months or one year prior to the proposed sabbatical.

The sabbatical plan should include:

1. a description of the desired sabbatical activities.
2. a statement of how these activities will benefit the pastor and the church.
3. the dates selected for the sabbatical.
4. a budget outlining sabbatical costs for things like: travel, classes, retreats, counseling etc.
5. how the pastor's ministry will be carried out during the sabbatical.

Approval of a sabbatical plan is at the discretion of the church council and Joint Commission Chairpersons.

Other methods for sabbatical may be arranged upon mutual agreement between the church and the pastor and the written approval of the Joint Commission Chairpersons.

### **Timing**

A sabbatical may be approved for five weeks. Paid sabbatical time is in addition to the pastor's paid vacation for the year in which the sabbatical is taken.

The sabbatical must be taken consecutively in order to maximize the possibility for refreshment or concentrated study. If possible, the sabbatical should be scheduled at a time that will minimize the disruptive effect on the normal operation of the church. (i.e. summer may be preferable).

Unless approved by the church council, no two staff members shall take a sabbatical within six months of each other. If staff member's sabbatical plans conflict, priority shall be given to the most senior member in terms of length of service.

The Credentialing and Placement Commission will assist the local church in securing pastoral services during the pastor's sabbatical. The local church will be responsible for the remuneration to the supply pastor during the pastor's sabbatical.

### **Financial Agreement**

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Ad Council approved 11/30/2020

During the sabbatical, regular salary and full benefits will be paid. Reimbursable expenses will be determined on the basis of a sabbatical budget approved by the church council. The amount requested should not exceed budgeted professional expenses plus an additional “sabbatical allowance” not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_. Some of this may be taxable. This will be determined upon review of your plan, budget, and actual expenses. Taxable expenses will be reported through payroll.

### **Reports**

Upon returning, the pastor will make a written report to the church council and Joint Commission Chairpersons and give an oral report to the congregation recapping how the time was spent, what was learned and how will it benefit the church.

The pastor would meet with the Pastoral Family Health Commission and share his or her sabbatical experience.

### **Pastor and Church Agreement About Employment**

The pastor who chooses to take a Sabbatical Leave under this policy agrees to the following terms:

1. Because the Sabbatical Leave is unlike an ordinary paid vacation in that its purpose is expressly for the future benefit of the employing church as well as for the present and future benefit of the pastor.
2. The pastor agrees he or she will continue in full-time service to the church for at least two years from the date of his or her return from Sabbatical Leave. If the pastor does not complete the required two years of service, he or she understands it will be his or her responsibility to fully reimburse the sabbatical salary and benefits to the church.
3. While the pastor is on a sabbatical, the pastor agrees that he or she will not be actively looking for an appointment to another church or ministry.

The church agrees to the following terms:

1. The church agrees that it will not in any way seek a replacement for the pastor during his or her Sabbatical Leave.

2. The church agrees that it will honor the leave of the pastor and agrees not to contact him or her with church business.
3. The church agrees that sabbatical leave is separate from the pastor's yearly vacation time.
4. The church council will be responsible for handling all routine and emergency duties during the pastor's sabbatical. The only exception where the pastor could be contacted would be the death of a congregant if he or she was requested to conduct the funeral.
5. If for some reason while the pastor is on a sabbatical and feels God is calling the pastor to another ministry, he or she must negotiate with the church regarding his or her financial responsibilities incurred during the sabbatical as outlined under Pastor and Church Agreement item No. 2.

**CHURCHES OF GOD, GENERAL CONFERENCE**  
**EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE**  
**PASTOR CODE OF ETHICS**

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.  
(2 Corinthians 6:3)

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. (Philippians 1:27)

All who are called by God to the ministry of the gospel solemnly commit to a life of joyful obedience and selfless service in order to glorify God and enrich his people. Therefore, a minister will promise to trust Jesus Christ as Savior, to acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and to believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Pursue Integrity**

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. (1 Chronicles 29:17)

Ministers are called by God to an office that requires integrity and high standards; therefore, it is right that people expect ministers to act accordingly.

The minister's integrity in personal business and financial dealing is also an ethical concern, and ministers should never involve themselves or their congregations in questionable business practices, nor should they incur debts they cannot pay in a reasonable time, nor should they leave any community with unpaid personal bills.

**• in personal character**

Exalt Christ, not self. Be honest, not exaggerating or overpromising; peace-loving, not contentious; patient, not volatile; diligent, not slothful.

Avoid and, when necessary, report conflicts of interest and seek counsel.

In their personal lives all ministers, acting as God's servants, follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love their neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world. In both their personal and professional lives, they strive to further the peace, unity, and purity of the Church, and serve with honesty, integrity and love.

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- **in personal care**

Care for the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical dimensions of your person, for "your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The minister's must be at his or her best physically to meet the demands of the ministry day.

The minister needs to carefully budgeting of his or her time and means.

- **in preaching and teaching**

"In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:7-8).

The minister must interpret the Bible accurately and apply it discerningly:

Speak the truth in love. Give due credit when using the words or ideas of others.

### **Be Trustworthy**

It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10).

Model the trustworthiness of God in leadership to encourage and develop trustworthiness in other and your congregations.

Use power and influence prudently and humbly. Foster loyalty.

Demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of the entire congregation. Keep promises.

Respond sensitively and appropriately to ministry requests and needs.

- **in leadership**

Minister of the Word is in leadership of the people of God in a peculiarly Christian lifestyle which has at its core the embodiment of Jesus's words in John 15:12:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

The minister must exercise wise leadership in instructing his or her people and in guiding them through their faith journey.

- with information

"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret" (Proverbs 11:13)

Guard confidences carefully. Inform a person in advance, if possible, when an admission is about to be made that might legally require the disclosure of that information.

Communicate truthfully and discreetly when asked about individuals with destructive or sinful behavior patterns. Tell the truth, or remain discreetly silent.

- **with resources**

"If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Luke 16:11).

Be honest and prudent in regard to personal and ministry resources. Refuse gifts that could compromise your ministry or your church.

Ensure that all designated gifts are used for their intended purpose. Don't be swayed by previous decisions.

### **Seek Purity**

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

The minister's life must be above reproach both socially and morally.

His or her personal habits must be such that will not bring reproach upon the cause. But will honor it. (I Timothy 3: 1-7, II Timothy 2:24-26)

- **in maintaining sexual purity**

"Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality" (Ephesians 5:3a)

Avoid sinful sexual behavior and inappropriate involvement. Resist temptation.

The minister must exercise the greatest discretion in all of his/her relationships with anyone for which he/she feels a sexual attraction.

Show sensible regard for the moral, social, and religious standards of the Christian community and the community at large, realizing that any violation on their part may be damaging to their parishioners, colleagues in ministry, to their calling, and to the body of Jesus Christ.

- **in spiritual formation**

"Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Earnestly seek the help of the Holy Spirit for guidance and spiritual growth. Be faithful to maintain a heart of devotion to the Lord. Be consistent and intentional in prayer and scriptural study.

- **in theology**

Study the Bible regularly and carefully to understand its message, and embrace biblical doctrine. In forming theology, consider biblical teaching authoritative over all other sources.

Reserve time for study, contemplation and quiet time for prayer and meditation.

- **in professional practice**

Identify a minister/counselor who can provide personal counseling and advice when needed.

Develop an awareness of personal needs and vulnerabilities.

Avoid taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of others through exploitation or manipulation.

Address the misconduct of another clergy member directly or, if necessary, through appropriate persons to whom that member of the clergy may be accountable.

### **Embrace Accountability**

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3).

The minister is held accountable for all of his or her personal actions and must never violate the confidences and sacred trust of others.

The minister is accountable not only to the Lord, but to the church and the Eastern Regional Conference that ordains him or her.

- **in finances**

Promote accepted accounting practices and regular audits.

Ensure that church funds are used for their intended ministry purposes.

Never hold a position where you are distributing funds for your church.

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- **in ministry responsibilities**

Ensure clarity in authority structures, decision-making procedures, position descriptions, and grievance policies.

Model accountability at the highest organizational levels.

- **in a denomination or a ministry organization**

Ensure compliance with denominational standards and expectations, including regular reports, attendance at annual conference and committee meetings which you are a member.

- **with parishioners**

Preach and teach the Word of God to meet the needs of the entire congregation.

Assume responsibility for congregational health.

When asked for help beyond personal competence, refer others to those with requisite expertise.

- **with the community**

Build God's Kingdom in cooperation, not competition, with other local ministries.

Provide Christian ministries to the public as possible.

Encourage good citizenship.

- **with a prior congregation**

Do not recruit parishioners from a previous church without permission from the pastor.

Avoid interfering in the ministry of a previous congregation where you served.

As a minister of the gospel, I commit to abide by the standards set forth by the Eastern Regional Conference and this policy.

The \_\_\_\_\_ (Church) recognizes the pastor as the spiritual leader of our church. The church leadership and pastor support and agree with the Pastor Code of Ethic as set forth by the Eastern Regional Conference. The church leadership recognizes the importance of a positive relationship with the pastor during his/her service to the church. The church leadership shall ultimately be responsible to see their shepherd is nurtured, cared for, and supported

Pastor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Church Council  
President Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Church Health Commission

## *An Overview*

Our Mission: Moving churches toward mature spiritual health, we help them realize their identity in Christ and fulfill their mission and vision.

Through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we will:

1. Help pastors understand their identity in Christ: call, competencies, leadership role; and then equip them to transform church culture to reflect God's kingdom.
2. Help congregations understand their identity as Christ's church by: unifying leadership, clarifying direction, confessing sins, and making disciples around God's mission.

This involves but is not limited to the following:

1. Oversee and enhance the relationships between pastors and congregations.
2. Provide churches, pastors and leaders resources in the best practices for ministry and healthy church operations.
3. Oversee all property issues.
4. Provide conflict resolution.
5. Set guidelines and policies to further define and execute its missions, subject to the approval of the Administrative Council.

Here are some of the services we offer to accomplish these tasks:

### Healthy Church Check-ups

Healthy church check-ups are conducted with the pastor and leadership teams of the congregation. These visits include answering a series of questions prior to the meeting. Then there is a two-hour long meeting where representatives from the commission and congregation share joys and mutual concerns and seek how God is working, so the mission of discovering, developing and deploying disciples may be promoted.

### Effective Church Council Training:

This is a six-session training to enhance the leadership of the current council members, as well as future members. A representative of the commission can provide six 90-minute trainings for your leadership or two Saturday trainings for the leadership. The topics of the sessions are:

1. The Stewardship of Leadership
2. Character Traits of Leaders
3. Soul Care for Leaders

4. Decision Making
5. Communication with the Congregation
6. Planning and Leading Meetings

Brief summary recordings of these trainings can be found on the ERC Webpage <https://ercog.org/resources/commissions/effective-church-councils/> and can be used as review sessions or can be used to train new council members. To set up a training with your leadership contact Dave Robinson.

#### Property Issues:

A property task force helps the local church when it seeks to purchase or sell property. This task force can also give guidance during major upgrades and must approve any addition to the current facility/facilities. When a loan is needed, the task force will give the congregation guidance in pursuing a loan through the Home Mission Council or any other lending institution. The full commission has final say over the securing of a loan, the purchase of property and the selling of any property. The reason for this oversight is our belief in the church being one. There is one church with many locations. When one part suffers we all suffer. When a church defaults on its loan, the entire conference is responsible for it; therefore, it is our responsibility to make sure the local congregation is able to handle the loan. This thought process is also secured in the language found on the deeds which say the property is held in trust for the ERC. Many people incorrectly believe the Conference owns the property. This is a false understanding. The local congregation has ownership. This statement comes into play if the local congregation ceases to exist. The IRS does not permit individuals to profit from a 501c3 (non-profit organization); therefore, the assets must be distributed to another non-profit organization.

#### Conflict resolution:

God's desire is for us to live in peace with one another. Unfortunately, we are not always very good at showing love to one another. Often, we prefer to be peace keepers rather than peace makers. We ignore the conflict, hope it goes away, and stuff our emotions. This does not work, nor is it God's design for human relations. Jesus teaches when you are in conflict, you go to your brother to seek reconciliation. He also teaches when your sister is in conflict with you and you realize it, you are to go to her seeking reconciliation. When interpersonal tensions grow beyond your ability to handle, members of the commission are available to come give guidance and seek reconciliation and restoration between the parties. More often than not, by the time Conference representatives are notified, the conflict has grown beyond people's willingness to repair the relationship. It is best to inform us of the situation as soon as possible, so we can give Godly counsel.

#### Next Generation ministries:

Bible Quizzing is a great ministry for teens to learn the Bible, spend time with a committed adult, and compete against other teens their age.



## Credentialing and Placement

Every pastor builds upon the pastors who have come before and will leave a journey for others to follow. We are all temps in our current place of ministry and vocation. When you sense you may be called to another ministry, you are expected/required to contact a representative of the Placement Task Force. Our first responsibility will be to talk you out of resigning, which means we want to assist you in discerning God's will for you. This is a vital step before you terminate your ministry at the local congregation. Technically, you resign to the conference, and we accept the resignation. Then the local council is informed, and we begin the process of helping the church find another pastor, as well as helping you as pastor move to your next ministry, retirement or vocation.

From time to time, as other congregations are seeking a pastor, you may be contacted by a representative of the Placement Task Force. When this happens, we request you to prayerfully consider the ministry opportunity. If you sense God is not asking you to leave your current ministry, then simply say so. If you sense God may be calling you to another ministry, then follow the current procedures for applying to become the pastor of this congregation. Be sure to work with and through the placement representative. At no time should you contact the local church without first being in conversation with the placement representative. Nor should any search team contact you without going through the placement representative first.

### **Pastoral Ethics Towards Other Pastors and Previous Ministries:**

It is considered unethical for you to hinder another pastor in his/her ministry. This would include speaking in such a way that another congregation would not want to hire this person. It would also include providing ministry to a previous congregation without the permission of the current pastor (i.e. funeral, wedding, or visiting someone in hospital, nursing home or in-home). When a previous congregant would call or visit you, feel free to be courteous to the person. You may have had a strong relationship with the person, and now this ministry relationship has changed into a friendship. This may be rather innocent, in nature but may be threatening to the current pastor. It is unethical for you to speak against the ministry practices of the current pastor, no matter what your opinion may be. Your intimate knowledge of the congregation has passed. The church has always belonged to God, and we need to remember to act accordingly.

## SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY

### Eastern Regional Conference

**Section 1. Purpose-** The purpose of this document is to: (1) establish a policy for the Eastern Regional Conference Churches of God General Conference, that defines and prohibits sexual misconduct; and (2) establish a procedure to address complaints relating to alleged violations of this Sexual Misconduct Policy.

**Section 2. Introduction-** We believe and proclaim that all people are created by God. God values all human life and intends that everyone -- men, women, and children - have worth and dignity in all relationships. We believe in justice for all persons. We believe that we have the responsibility to protect all persons whom we are called to serve. The expectation of persons served, is that church leaders will use the power and the intimacy of their roles with integrity, sensitivity, and caring.

The nature of the relationship between a professional and a congregant is often unequal, and the exploitation of such authority for self-interested ends constitutes a breach of trust implicit in that relationship. The work of the pastor, in particular, often of necessity involves conveying empathy, connection and warmth, which can sometimes create dilemmas in the navigation of appropriate relationships. *It is the professional – not the congregant – who is primarily responsible for establishing and preserving appropriate boundaries.* Other leaders of the Congregation, such as board members, officers, and key volunteers also hold positions of trust that they must exercise with care and not abuse. Any use of these positions or relationships to gain sexual favors, or to sexually harass another is abusive, exploitative, unjust, and incompatible with the sacred nature of the role. Sexual misconduct of any kind, is unacceptable by our church leadership.

### Section 3. Definitions

- 3.1 **Administrative Council.** Council which oversees the business of the Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God, as defined by the Eastern Regional Conference Constitution. Each congregation also has an Administrative Council or governing board.
- 3.2 **Bylaws.** The Bylaws of the Eastern Regional Conference, or of a certain congregation, in effect when a complaint has been filed under this Policy.
- 3.3 **Care Teams.** A group sent to offer care to a congregation following an incident of misconduct. This team is not sent to investigate, but to listen, care for the congregation, and help them navigate through this difficult incident. Care teams may also be involved in providing follow up care to the complainant, and/or respondent.
- 3.4 **Complainant.** A person who has lodged a written or verbal complaint under this Policy. A Complainant may be the alleged victim or someone who has allegedly witnessed, or has knowledge of, a violation of this Policy.

- 3.5 **Congregant.** A member of the Congregation, his or her family member or any other person receiving services from a Professional or Lay Leader.
- 3.6 **Congregation.** The local church.
- 3.7 **Employee.** A person employed by the Congregation in a non-Professional capacity.
- 3.8 **Officer.** The President, Vice-President, Financial Secretary, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, or such other person defined as an “officer” of the Congregation under the Bylaws.
- 3.9 **Lay Leader.** An Officer, a member of the Board, and any other member of the Congregation, including an adult or adolescent volunteer, who exercises authority on behalf of the Congregation.
- 3.10 **Professional.** The pastor, a teacher, a youth director and any other person who is hired by the Congregation to provide religious and/or educational instruction or services for the Congregation, or who serves as an independent contractor.
- 3.11 **Respondent.** The person against whom a complaint of Sexual Misconduct has been made.
- 3.12 **Response Team.** The team that will follow up initially when a complaint is made. This team will be made up of either the Executive Director or the Director of Church Health and other designated leaders from the conference or congregation, as applicable to the situation.
- 3.13 **Sexual Harassment.** Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature (regardless of whether such verbal conduct is in person or is by telephonic, electronic or written communication), where:
- a. the conduct interferes with work, study, prayer, or other aspects of church life by creating an environment that is subjectively and objectively intimidating, hostile or offensive to a Congregant, guest of the church, Professional, or Employee. It includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexually-oriented humor or language; unwelcome questions or comments about sexual behavior, preference or orientation; unwelcome physical contact, inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance, or unwelcome requests for social engagements or interaction; and/or
  - b. rejection or acceptance of such conduct is used as a basis for prohibiting or limiting participation in the communal life of the church and its activities, the receipt of church services, or as a basis for making employment decisions.
  - c. This does not restrict (preclude) the professional from addressing biblical morality standards, and holding people accountable as to their fitness as a lay leader within the congregation as long the person is addressed with gentleness and respect.

**3.14 Sexual Malfeasance.** Sexual contact between a Professional, Employee, or Lay Leader, and a Congregant. Among other things, it includes contact of a physical nature between adults in an unequal relationship that may involve inappropriate touching, embraces, assault, kissing, touching breasts or genitals, verbal suggestions of sexual involvement, sexually demeaning comments, or sexual intercourse. It also includes activity such as dating during the course of a counseling relationship between a Professional and a Congregant.

**3.15. Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct includes, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- a. Sexual contact of any nature with a minor or legally incompetent person;
- b. Sexual Harassment;
- c. Rape or sexual contact by force, threat or intimidation;
- d. Sexual Malfeasance;
- e. Generally unwelcome behaviors or unwanted attention of a sexual nature, including winks, leers, suggestive comments, crude language, pinching, tickling or unwelcome hugs and kisses;
- f. Adultery;
- g. Pornography;
- h. Homosexual behavior of any kind;
- i. Bestiality;
- j. Prostitution; or
- k. Incest.

**3.16 Standing Committee.** The Standing Committee of the Eastern Regional Conference is called by the Executive Director when needed, and consists of Executive Director, the current President, Vice President, Chairperson of the Commission on Church Health, & Chairperson of the Commission on Credentialing and Placement.

## **Section 4. Guiding Principles and Assumptions**

**4.1.** Sexual Harassment, Sexual Malfeasance and Sexual Misconduct are antithetical to the values and ethics of the Eastern Regional Conference, to the values and ethics of our Congregations, and to an ethical society at large.

- 4.2. This Policy and its procedures are designed and should be applied to promote fairness to (1) the Complainant, (2) the Respondent, and (3) the Congregation. Strict criminal standards of evidence do not apply to the proceedings described below, and the investigations and hearings described in this Policy are not bound by the formal rules of criminal or civil courts.
- 4.3. All allegations will be taken seriously, investigated, and treated confidentially. Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis for the purpose of conducting an investigation or as required by law. The identity of the Complainant shall be kept confidential to the extent possible, but neither anonymity nor absolute confidentiality can be guaranteed. All of those involved in the process of investigating a complaint will be instructed to respect and maintain the confidentiality of information received during the process.
- 4.4. These guidelines are not designed or intended to avoid civil or criminal charges that may be made by the Complainant. If civil and/or criminal charges are threatened or filed, an investigation will still be conducted to the best of our ability.
- 4.5. All Employees, Officers, Lay Leaders, Professionals and others authorized to act on behalf of the Congregation will cooperate fully with any governmental authority (e.g., Department of Public Welfare, police, District Attorney's Office) charged by law with investigating allegations of sexual abuse.
- 4.6. All cases of suspected child abuse and cases that involve other criminal allegations shall be reported immediately to the appropriate governmental authorities, as set forth by the laws of the state where the case occurred. The Eastern Regional Conference has churches in various states, including PA, MD, NC, SC, NY & VA. All Complainants will also be urged to notify governmental authorities whenever criminal conduct is alleged.
- 4.7. No single individual should ever determine that an allegation is not serious enough to investigate.
- 4.8. Those responsible for investigating an alleged violation of this Policy should withhold judgment about what occurred until the investigation has been completed. Statements or actions that impugn the integrity or motives of the Complainant should be avoided. Similarly, judgments about the guilt or innocence of the Respondent should be avoided until the investigation has been completed.
- 4.9. Both the Complainant and the Respondent should be informed of the process that will be used to investigate the complaint, as well as the identity of a person to whom questions about this process may be directed.
- 4.10. Any and every act of sexual misconduct within the church, will cause hurt and do damage to the body of Christ. We believe, through Christ, with time and repentance, healing can occur with a process that seeks justice and restoration.

## **Section 5. Terms of Policy**

- 5.1. It is a violation of this Policy for any Professional, to engage in any form of Sexual Harassment, Sexual Malfeasance and/or Sexual Misconduct.
- 5.2. A Professional, who is attempting to be caring and supportive of a Congregant must recognize that the manner in which such support is conveyed can be misinterpreted. Individuals who occupy such positions (especially a pastor) must be especially sensitive to the danger of such perceptions and to avoid behavior that a Congregant could reasonably misconstrue. All Professionals, Employees, and Lay Leaders should be sensitive to appropriate locations, hours, and the nature of their interactions and physical contact with a Congregant.
- 5.3. No Professional, may engage in, or attempt to engage in, sexual activity with a minor or legally incompetent adult.
- 5.4. No Professional, may engage in, or attempt to engage in, sexual activity with a married or partnered Congregant (except for the case of a Congregant that the Professional, is married to), or with any person who the Professional is counseling or aiding in life cycle events, conversion or other like situations. Such sexual relationships are forbidden, even if suggested or welcomed by the Congregant.
- 5.5. If a Congregant misinterprets the concern of a Professional, as the expression of romantic or sexual interest, it is the responsibility of the Professional, to state that such a relationship is not possible.
- 5.7. The Eastern Regional Conference shall not knowingly permit interaction between a minor or legally incompetent adult and any Professional, with a civil or criminal record of child abuse of any kind, or who has admitted prior abuse -sexual or otherwise, or who is known to have a paraphilic diagnosis (e.g., pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism) as defined by the American Psychiatric Association.
- 5.8. The Eastern Regional Conference shall conduct thorough screenings of all applicants for credentialed ministerial positions. This screening shall include, but is not limited to criminal background checks, formal interviews, and other reference or background checks.

**Section 6. Procedures for Investigating a Complaint-** The procedures set forth below are designed to promote a prompt and fair response to Congregant complaints of Sexual Misconduct. The Eastern Regional Conference recognizes, however, that each situation is unique. Accordingly, it may be appropriate for the Ad

Council, Standing Committee, or leadership to deviate from the process described below, as circumstances warrant.

- 6.1. Whenever an Officer, Board member, Professional or Employee of a Congregation believes in good faith that Sexual Misconduct has occurred, he or she must notify the Director of Church Health or the Executive Director of the Eastern Regional Conference immediately.
- 6.2. As soon as practicable, but in no event later than 72 hours after first receiving notice of the alleged Sexual Misconduct, the Executive Director and/or Director of Church Health shall organize a response team to meet with the complainant to gather a formal written complaint and investigate the complaint. A person accused of Sexual Misconduct may not participate in any Executive Committee deliberations on the matter or in the investigation.
  - 6.2.1 The response team will consist of at least the Executive Director and/or the Director of Church Health, and other designated leaders as are called for based on the complaint and its nature.
  - 6.2.2 Even if the Complainant elects not to pursue formal disciplinary charges against a Professional, an Employee or a Lay Leader, the response team should continue its investigation if, on the basis of the complaint and initial investigation, it has continuing concern about the fitness of the Professional, Employee or Lay Leader to remain employed by, or to remain in an unpaid position of authority with, the Congregation.
- 6.3. If the allegation involves suspected child abuse of any kind, the Director of Church Health and/or Executive Director shall notify the appropriate authorities immediately, as set forth in the appropriate state code, e.g. in PA, the Child Protective Services Laws, or in MD, the Family Laws.
- 6.4. After the response team has completed its initial investigation and has determined that further investigation is warranted, it should meet as soon as is practicable with the Respondent. (See Attached Respondent Interview Procedure.)
- 6.5. Upon completion of its investigation, if necessary, the Standing Committee shall convene to determine what action, if any, it should recommend to the Administrative Council. A special meeting of the Administrative Council may be called for this purpose, if necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE BEEN GIVEN A COPY OF THE EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY, THAT I HAVE READ THE POLICY, THAT I HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS, THAT I UNDERSTAND THE POLICY, AND THAT I AGREE TO COMPLY WITH ITS TERMS AND CONDITIONS.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Discipleship Commission

Staff Contact: Diane Hakes

[diane@ercog.org](mailto:diane@ercog.org)

717.773.6055



**A Culture of Discipleship:** We seek to establish a culture of disciple making through people development. The goal is that this results in authentic Discipleship, which, according to John Mark Comer in *Practicing the Way, is the whole life process of being with Jesus for the purpose of becoming like him and carrying on his work in the world.* The commitment below has the guiding principles for the culture we seek to live, through all aspects of the ERC. The Administrative Council, our commission, our staff, and everyone who is a part of the ERC are asked to dedicate themselves to living these values as Jesus taught His disciples.

**In response to Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:2, I will pursue a lifestyle that demonstrates the mission to Discover, Develop, and Deploy Disciples as Jesus commanded. May my life reflect the following:**

**Discover - Hear and See the potential God sees**

1. I will listen to the voice of God.
2. I will adjust to what God has revealed.
3. I will depend on Holy Spirit for power, love, and a sound mind (self-discipline).

**Develop - Engage and Cultivate toward whole life maturity in Christ.**

4. I will model Jesus through life on life relationships.
5. I will prepare them to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and love like Jesus.

**Deploy - Send and Resource the mission God prepared**

6. I will release disciple-makers to God's calling in EVERY domain of culture.
7. I will invest in their kingdom impact that God designed.

**By God's Word and in His strength through Jesus Christ, Amen.**

**Discipleship Commission Focus:** To help individuals, pastors, leaders, and ministries form pathways of disciple making in their context that demonstrates the mission to Discover, Develop, and Deploy Disciples as Jesus commanded. We do this by providing resources, coaching, equipping and training.

**Below are just some of the tools and processes we currently have available.**

- **The Exchange: A Disciple Makers Gathering:** a half-day practical workshop designed to explore the cultural values/commitments we have for making disciples which follows the pathway outlined above for Discover, Develop, and Deploy.
- **Younique:** A guided discovery process for naming and living out your God-given design, gifts, and calling.
- **Plan A:** customized coaching process for ministries that examines the effectiveness of structures, systems, and programs for developing people and disciple-making pathways.
- **Individual Coaching:** Designed for those discerning their direction in ministry. We provide a coach and a catalyzing partner, with assessments and a process to walk through. Ideally, this would be in co-operation with a local congregation/leadership.
- **Training/Equipping:** We help by identifying tools and customizing experiences that meet you where you are in this process. Then we build a training and equipping process that will move you forward with a greater understanding of

what it means to be a disciple, how to be a disciple maker, and how to develop pathways for discipleship in your own context.

We believe that, with God, the potential is limitless and together we are stronger than we are apart. Contact me to discover how the Discipleship Commission can best serve you in creating a culture of disciple making in your context.



# CHURCHES OF GOD, GENERAL CONFERENCE

## Blanket 501(c)(3) Application

### Great Stewardship

Receiving an official non-profit status letter from the IRS, costs time and money. The General Conference has graciously provided a way for us to be blanketed under their 501(c)(3) determination letter. The following documents provide the application and instructions to be part of this blanket. If you have questions, please contact the General Conference.

**CGGC**

Kathy Bishop, Treasurer. [treasurer@cggc.org](mailto:treasurer@cggc.org), 419.424.1961

**Churches of God, General Conference**  
**Application to Participate in Federal Group Tax Exemption**

Date of Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Official Name of Church: \_\_\_\_\_

Location Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date Organized: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer Identification Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fiscal Year End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Has your church previously received a ruling or letter of determination relating to tax exemption from the IRS? (Mark One)

Yes, a copy is attached with this application.

No.

Attached is a copy of our: (Attach all which exist)

Conformed copy of Articles of Incorporation

Conformed copy of Constitution (Please complete Affirmation of Constitution if your conformed copy does not include date of implementation and signatures of officials)

**NOTE:** *Documents must include a Purpose section, a statement that no assets will inure to the benefit of private individuals, a provision for the distribution of assets upon the dissolution of the church, and a clear statement that indicates that the church is a member of the Churches of God, General Conference. If any of these items are not present in the documents, we will not be able to include your church/conference in the group until you modify your documents.*

**Affirmation:**

I have examined the church’s organizing documents and I confirm that the present purposes and activities are in accordance with the organizing documents. I further affirm that the sources of revenue are primarily contributions received from individuals, earnings on investments, occasional sales of assets and de minimus amounts from sales of baked goods, etc. And the expenditures of revenue received are for the purposes we are organized.

We also affirm that we will not conduct charitable gaming, issue tax-exempt bonds, or be involved in low-income, elderly or handicapped housing.

When a professional fundraiser is used an “arms-length” business transaction is conducted that involves a contract for services to be rendered. The church’s decision-making body assures that there is no conflict of interest between those making the decision and the organization contracted with. The contract does not allow for excessive income to be reimbursed to the fundraiser for their services. As fees for services approach 35% or more of the contributions raised, the fees are considered to be excessive.

Further, I affirm that our church does not, and will not, as a substantial part of its activities, attempt to influence legislation or participate to any extent in a political campaign for or against any candidate for public office.

Signature of Authorized Official: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Title of Official: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** *Churches of God, General Conference will notify you if, and when, your Application under the Group Exemption has been approved.*

Return to: Kathy Bishop  
Churches of God, General Conference  
P O Box 926  
Findlay, OH 45839

## Sample Key Organizing Document Clauses

The church is organized and incorporated exclusively for religious and charitable purposes as such purposes are defined by § 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or the corresponding section of any future Internal Revenue Law of the United States). No part of the net earnings of the church shall inure to the benefit of any individual and no member, director, officer or employee of the church shall receive any pecuniary benefits of any kind except reasonable compensation for services in effecting the corporate purposes. No substantial part of the activities of the church shall consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, nor shall the church participate or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing statements of) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the church shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a church exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a church, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

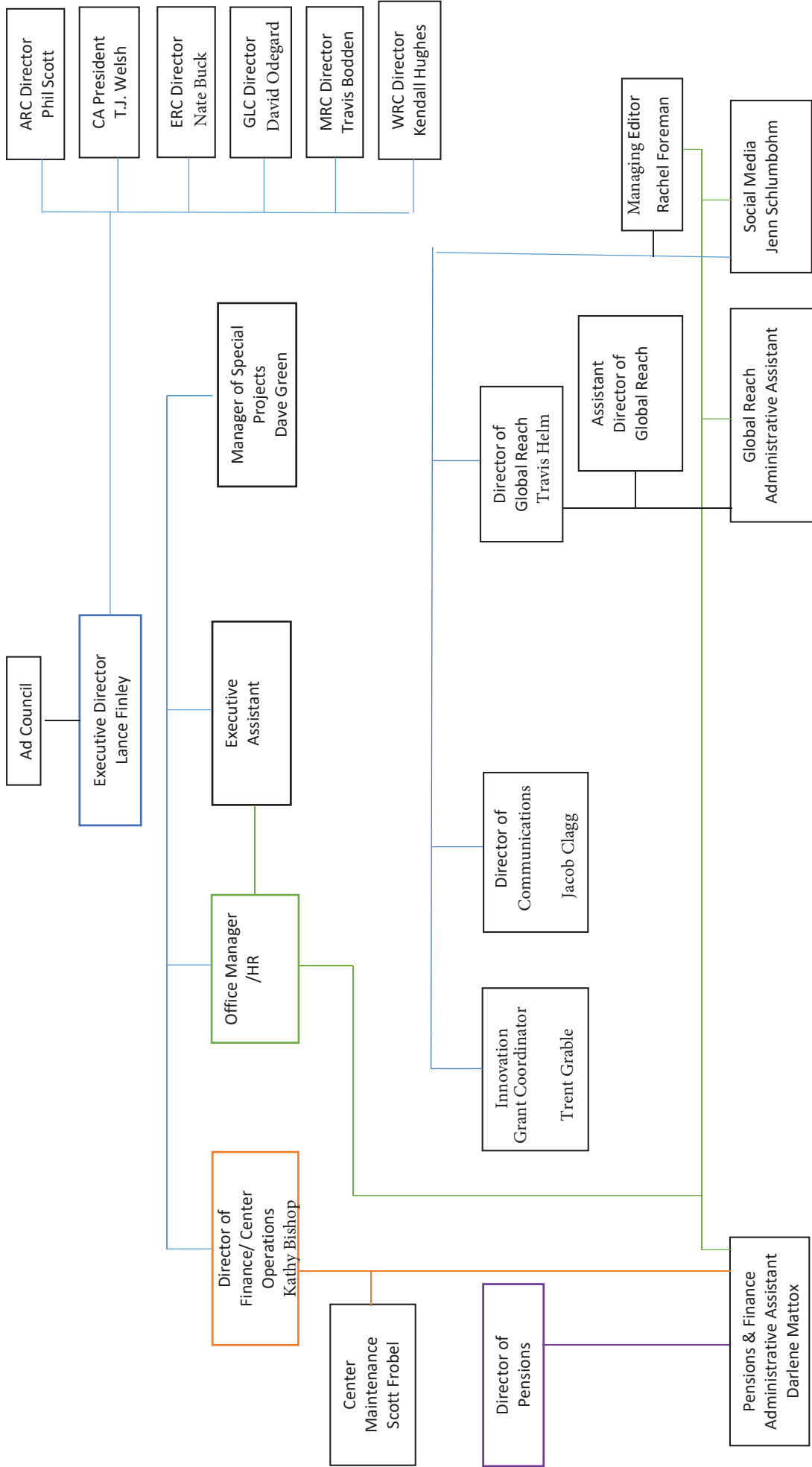
Upon dissolution of the incorporated church, voluntarily or involuntarily, by judicial order, or otherwise, all its unencumbered assets, or the residue of its assets after paying or providing for all debts and obligations, shall be transferred or conveyed to The Eastern Regional Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference, a Pennsylvania nonprofit corporation, or its successor in interest or assigns, as an unrestricted Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. In the event The Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God, General Conference, is not a qualified tax exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986, or the corresponding section of any future Federal tax code at the time of the dissolution of this church, then the net assets, or the residue of the assets of the church shall be transferred or conveyed to any qualified tax exempt charitable or religious organization or organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 as shall be selected by a majority vote of the members of the church or its governing body.

## Key Organizing Document Clauses

The church is organized exclusively for religious and charitable purposes as such purposes are defined by § 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or the corresponding section of any future Internal Revenue Law of the United States). No part of the net earnings of the church shall inure to the benefit of any individual and no member, director, officer or employee of the church shall receive any pecuniary benefits of any kind except reasonable compensation for services in effecting the church's purposes. No substantial part of the activities of the church shall consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, nor shall the church participate or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing statements of) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the church shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a church exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a church, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Upon dissolution of the church, voluntarily or involuntarily, by judicial order, or otherwise, all its unencumbered assets, or the residue of its assets after paying or providing for all debts and obligations, shall be transferred or conveyed to The Eastern Regional Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference, a Pennsylvania nonprofit corporation, or its successor in interest or assigns, as an unrestricted Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. In the event The Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God, General Conference, is not a qualified tax exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986, or the corresponding section of any future Federal tax code at the time of the dissolution of this church, then the net assets, or the residue of the assets of the church shall be transferred or conveyed to any qualified tax exempt charitable or religious organization or organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 as shall be selected by a majority vote of the members of the church or its governing body.

# General Conference Restructure 2024







BOARD OF PENSIONS
ENROLLMENT INFORMATION SCHEDULE

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Address of Pension Member (Please Print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_ SS # \_\_\_\_\_

Job/Position Title \_\_\_\_\_ Hire Date \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Address of Spouse (Please Print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_ SS # \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Marriage \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate of living children under 21

Name M/F Month Day Year

Blank lines for entering child information

Board of Pensions, Churches of God, General Conference 700 E. Melrose Ave., P.O. Box 926 Findlay, OH 45839
Phone 419-424-1961 Fax 419-424-3433 Email pensions@cggc.org.

# HERE WE STAND

## Here We Stand: Introduction/Preface

Revival and reform serve as the double helix of the Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) DNA. These two priorities date back to the birth of the CGGC in 1830 during America's Second Great Awakening. They originate in Christ's commission to his disciples to carry on his work of redemption (Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:21). The reason why the Church, including the CGGC, exists is to help people everywhere experience Jesus' love and find abundant life in Him (John 10:10). This is accomplished similarly to Jesus who ministered through teaching, preaching and healing (Matthew 9:35), and it encompasses both spiritual and temporal dimensions as James points out in his letter (James 2:14-18).

John Winebrenner (1797-1860) and other first generation CGGC ministers promoted and participated in the reform causes of their day including the anti-slavery movement, temperance, Sabbath (Sunday) school and higher education, care for the poor and destitute, etc. These issues and more found voice in CGGC publications like *The Gospel Publisher* (1835-1845) and *The Church Advocate* (1845 to the present). Furthermore local churches and individuals engaged in activities like the Underground Railroad, providing for widows and orphans, establishing academies for higher learning, etc. In 1844 the CGGC published a manifesto of its mission "*pro bono publico*" (for the public good) in The History of All Religious Denominations and declared its revival and reform agenda right alongside its doctrinal beliefs. The following year the churches came together in Pittsburgh to organize a General Conference based on those twenty-seven statements of faith and practice.

Ever since its creation in 1845 the CGGC has maintained its commitment to biblical integrity and social responsibility. The dedication to scriptural authority was most recently reaffirmed at the 2013 General Conference session in Findlay, OH with the adoption of the updated We Believe document. The acceptance of this fresh doctrinal statement, however, raises a huge question about contemporary living. Given these beliefs, what are the appropriate Christian responses to the social and moral issues of the twenty-first century? Church members want to know, and even the general public is watching to see, how the Church reacts. To that end the CGGC Administrative Council felt it would be helpful to create a document that focused upon these issues, offering a biblical and practical approach in response.

A writing team from across the CGGC was appointed to prepare a draft for consideration. This is that document. The team reviewed past position statements made by the General Conference (see Appendix below) and considered contemporary culture to develop a list of pertinent topics. The next step was to assign writers and work through various drafts and redrafts. The goal was to create statements reflecting positions generally espoused across the CGGC that are clear, practical, brief as possible, and solidly rooted in scripture. A uniform approach for all topics was developed to provide consistency in structure and presentation. Given the constantly changing nature of the verbiage used in some areas, the writers and the team as a whole attempted to utilize the most current terminology, but request the reader's indulgence and understanding on this matter. Scripture quotations come from the New International Version (2011 edition) unless otherwise noted in the text. Abbreviated citations in the text will point the reader to the "Selected References" section at the end of the document.

Ultimately the purpose of this Here We Stand document is to provide insight into the CGGC's biblical understanding of contemporary issues facing the Church and how congregations and individual Christians can respond. More broadly it will serve as an information and conversation piece for any enquiring person. It is not intended to be used as a weapon against those whose beliefs or behavior may not align with the positions articulated here. This is a conversation piece for individuals and the church to pray, explore scripture and seek the Lord's direction in matters of faith and practice in this world. Neither is this document intended as a fence to keep the world out of the Church, but quite the contrary. It is designed to serve as a gateway for open conversation and direct ministry in and to the world. God's people must be "salt and light" in their communities (Matthew 5:13-16). This reality lies at the heart of Jesus' mission and is the incarnation of his Gospel. Here We Stand is therefore a call for the CGGC, corporately and individually, to engage the world and not shy away from the issues of culture and contemporary life or become a mere by-stander. *Soli Deo gloria!*

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# 1. Abortion

## **What Is the Issue?**

We believe that every human life has value, including life in the womb. Consequently, to terminate the life of the unborn is a violation of the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." We as the Church choose to affirm the right to life of every human being from conception, and we deplore and oppose the concept, practice and legalization of abortion.

## **What Does Scripture Say?**

God alone is the author and giver of life, and all human beings are created in His image (Genesis 1:26). Human life is of God and has worth independent of the stage of development; that inestimable worth being explicitly affirmed in Psalm 139:13, Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Matthew 1:20.

## **How Do We Understand This?**

Life begins at conception. Therefore, all human life is sacred. This understanding is the foundation of what we believe as the Churches of God with regard to abortion.

## **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

We encourage our churches to take an active role in halting the blight of abortion in our society by responsibly interpreting and teaching God's word on this issue. Christians need to help others inside and outside the Church to understand the value placed on human life by God. We need to offer the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the counsel of the Holy Spirit to all whose lives are affected by abortion. We need to assist parents in finding a worthy home for an unwanted child and to offer to both men and women considering abortion the alternatives of life.

Since life is precious to God, both the life of the unborn child as well as the mother's life must be respected and protected. When the life of a mother is threatened by the birth of a child the Church must support the mother with the grace and love of God.

The Church has the responsibility to teach its members that life begins at conception. The Church must also emphasize the tragic consequences of a society that neglects to respect the miracle of life. The Church must be willing to assist parents in finding homes for unwanted children. It is the responsibility of the Church to help solve the problem of unwanted pregnancies.

Both men and women are affected by abortion. Because salvation is a gift of God the Church can and must offer forgiveness to all who confess their sins (1 John 1:9). Because God extends an invitation to begin anew in Jesus Christ the Church has an opportunity and an obligation to walk with individuals as they seek and experience healing and restoration. Responsible Christians help others understand the value of human life. At the same time, they always extend an offer of new life in Christ to any who will receive it.

## 2. The Abuse of Alcohol and Drugs

### What Is the Issue?

The abuse of alcohol and drugs has become widespread, supported by powerful and attractive advertising. More and more persons are using drugs illegally, with an accompanied rise in both death and crime.

### What Does Scripture Say?

“Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

“Everything is allowable to me, but not everything is profitable. Everything is allowable to me, but to nothing will I become a slave” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

“But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Galatians 5:13).

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

### How Do We Understand This?

First we remember the twofold concern of scripture in these matters. On the one hand we are to be involved in bringing healing to those caught in situations of drug and alcohol abuse. And secondly, we must remember that our witness to the wholeness Christ can guide us in personal decisions in all matters.

Jesus consumed wine, as did the Apostles, and the entire Jewish culture observed no prohibition on the consumption of alcohol. The Gospel of John conveys the details of Jesus’ attendance at a wedding at Cana in Galilee where he turned water into wine. Jesus accommodated the need for fresh supplies of wine for the wedding guests without a word of judgment.

Temperance is assumed as an underlying and general observance in Jewish society (Matthew 24:49-51). The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with disapproval for drunkenness. “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine . . . Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper” (Proverbs 23:29-32).

The biblical record portrays abuse of alcohol negatively. One need only read the accounts of Noah and Lot to find drunkenness condemned early in the biblical record. It is foolish, misleading, and a cause for concern, yet alcohol consumption is not forbidden. Certainly, temperance is taught and mostly practiced in Jesus’ day, but alcohol use is not overtly dealt with until the Gospel is carried into the Greco-Roman culture.

Paul writes guidelines to the newly formed and predominantly Gentile churches for a new society which bears the identity of Christ, the Church. Drunkenness is directly addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; 11:21; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; and 1 Thessalonians 5:7. These verses unequivocally condemn drunkenness and the immoral behavior generally associated with it.

So concerned was Paul with new moral standards which are in keeping with the believer's new identity in Christ that he issued the House Rule (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). Moreover, drunkenness was prohibited in all who were leaders in the church: elders, deacons, deaconesses (Titus 1:7; 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:8). These leaders were to provide an example that the church at large could follow.

Clearly, the Bible teaches temperance, but does it teach abstinence? Not directly. It does, however, provide that the guiding principle for Christian freedom is genuine love and concern for the body. Freedom must be expressed and tempered by love. Peter provides the interpretative lens for us concerning all issues pertaining to Christian freedom in 1 Peter 2:16-17: "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."

Paul concurs, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13). He further writes to the Corinthians that "everything was permissible to [him]" but that he "would not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Again, Paul states the principle of charitable love governing freedom when he says, "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15).

Drugs are to be treated in much the same way as alcohol, but it must be recognized that the civil government forbids the use of some drugs. The hermeneutical lens of 1 Peter 2:16-17 tells the believer to "honor the emperor." Therefore, illicit drugs cannot be used. Recreational drugs are unfortunately widely used in our society, even though they are illegal. They are particularly dangerous for their very immediate mind-altering impact. We find no justification for their use consistent with Christian lifestyle and witness.

Not all harmful drugs are illegal. Absent a law, the Christian must rely on his or her conscience which is informed by Biblical teaching and the Holy Spirit. Marijuana has been legalized in several states, but the fact that it is lawful in some locations does not mean that a Christian should use it. The same guidance for alcohol applies to this drug as well.

One further warning about mind-altering drugs (legal or illegal) is given by the historical understanding of drugs. The Greek word used in the New Testament for sorcery or witchcraft is *φαρμακεία* (*pharmakeia*). This word is the root of the modern word "pharmacy" or drugs. History links drugs and sorcery because the occult has always relied on mind-altering drugs in its rites. This fact does not necessarily make a drug sinful, but it stands as a warning that drugs can open one up to addiction and possibly spiritual oppression.

Clearly, the unregulated recreational use of drugs can ruin the mind and harm the user. We as Christians are called to live sober-minded. "For the culmination of all things is near. So be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of prayer" (1 Peter 4:7 NET). "The god of this world has blinded the *minds* of the unbelievers . . ." (2 Corinthians 4:4). "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning..." (1 Corinthians 15:34, ESV).

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

Within the Churches of God, there is wider acceptance of moderate consumption of alcohol than was true earlier in our history, but the Church still issues the biblical mandate of temperance and warns against the dangers of alcohol, reminding all that love is to rule all our actions.

Likewise, we do not wish to convey the idea that all drugs are unhelpful. Many have found relief from a host of suffering by the wise application of specific drugs under advisement of their medical doctor. It would be irresponsible to deny the validity of the ministry of the healers in the medical profession and the reliable and ongoing benefits which they afford us.

Following the dictates of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 6, our churches would be wise to pursue a no-alcohol policy on church property or at official church functions.

The Church needs to teach its people about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, particularly the dangers of abuse, and to hold its own people to wisdom in these matters. It should particularly hold its leaders accountable in the areas of abuse of alcohol and drugs. But in all cases, the Church needs to support persons who have an addiction through counseling, prayer and loving fellowship, coming alongside its people when these situations arise.

The church can also provide financial and facility support to a host of recovery groups that share its basic Christian values.

A further word to church leaders on this matter: The Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 8 discusses his position as a leader on eating meats offered to idols in light of the fact that he, as a leader, desired to set the highest example in matters regarding Christian freedom. He knew that as a Christian it was not sinful to eat meat offered to idols just as we believe it is not intrinsically sinful to drink a glass of wine. But he also knew that "Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled" (1 Corinthians 8:7). Although Paul knew he was "free" to eat meat offered to idols, he also knew that this behavior as a leader could become detrimental to others who, emboldened by his "example," might "be destroyed by (his) your knowledge" (v. 11). His conclusion?

"But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. (1 Corinthians 8:8-13)

As a leader, Paul willingly refused to exercise his freedom to eat meat offered to idols lest some Christian might see his example as a leader and come to spiritual harm. In our society, eating meat offered to idols is no longer an issue, but in the United States, alcohol abuse is an issue. There is no specific biblical mandate for abstinence, but perhaps our leaders should seriously consider abstinence as a critical piece of their leadership witness in their current cultural climate.



### 3. Adoption

#### What Is the Issue?

There are many orphans in the world today who need parents who will not only love them, but who will also teach them about God and His Kingdom.

#### What Does Scripture Say?

“Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12a).

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:5-6a).

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Proverbs 1:8-9).

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died” (Esther 2:7).

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’” (Matthew 19:14).

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves” (Ephesians 1:4-6).

#### How Do We Understand This?

God loves all people. He cares about the weak and vulnerable. Even when we sinned, He had a plan in place to restore us. Since we, as Christ’s followers, have been adopted by God, we realize firsthand the value of adoption.

God’s unconditional love for us provides us with an understanding of how to love others unconditionally. As Christians, married couples and single persons remain open to the possibility of God’s call to adopt. Adoption is an act of trust in which Christians accept God’s call to adopt and depend upon Him for the strength and guidance He will provide.

The purpose of adoption is “to provide the child a family, and not the reverse. Adoption is intended to address the child’s hardship” (Gilles Bernheim (Chief Rabbi of France), Translated by Ralph Hancock, “Homosexual Marriage, Parenting, and Adoption,” *First Things* no. 231, March 2013, 45). A father and mother’s involvement in an adopted child’s life is optimal for the adopted child. Adoption by a married man and woman “situate[s] [a child] in a generational chain” (Ibid, 44). In fact, their presence in a child’s life serves to “recreate lines of paternity and maternity” (Ibid.).

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

The Church's role is to help all parents. During dedication services, members of the Church promise to assist parents as they raise their children. The Church agrees to raise children in a loving, Christian environment.

In situations of adoption, the Church plays an even greater role. Through times of transition, the Church comes alongside adoptive parents and their child (ren) to offer needed prayer and support. The Church is called to extend the love of Christ both to families who are involved in the process of adoption and to orphans around the world.

Because of the great need for adoptive families, the church could encourage potential parents to consider adoption by inviting social service agencies to speak; raising awareness of the need; and praying openly for children in need of stable homes. Many communities have local family service agencies who would be glad to help congregations provide visibility for the need for adoption.

Likewise, the congregation can rally around adoptive parents. To know that the congregation is not only praying for parents, but is willing to listen, offer periodic childcare and other means of support, and invest in families brings needed relief to all parents, but especially those who "raise someone else's child." The congregation as the family of God is vital in supporting families, and especially adoptive parents.

## 4. The Care of Children

### What Is the Issue?

Children around the world are being abused and it breaks the heart of God. The Church needs to speak on their behalf because they have no voice of their own.

### What Does Scripture Say?

“[Jesus] called a little child and had him stand among his disciples. ‘Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea’” (Matthew 18:2, 5-6).

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. Your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:10-11, 14).

“‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:14b-16).

### How Do We Understand This?

From Jesus’ words and actions we learn that children are very near and dear to the heart of God. Their innocent, trusting nature is akin to the state of man before the Fall and an example to every adult of the essence of faith. Jesus words could hardly be clearer. To enter his kingdom requires one to be as a little child, to be born again in faith believing. The warning against child abuse is no less clear. The Lord will judge all those who cause a child to be turned from God’s way and be lost. And if God cursed the one who tempted Adam and Eve to sin, will he not also hold those accountable who abuse innocent children?

The Church needs to be in the forefront of child advocacy if it is to be true to Jesus’ teaching and example. Whether the issue is physical, mental or spiritual abuse and/or neglect, the Church needs to be involved in prevention, intervention, and subvention. Such ministry starts within the congregation but extends outward to the local community and beyond, even around the globe. The Church united in mission can help redeem the lives of children, one child at a time, by introducing them to the love of Jesus and giving them hope for a better future.

### How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Some child advocacy needs will vary from one local community to the next while others will be common to many locations, even crossing cultures. Hence, each congregation will need to pray and determine where and how the Lord would have them minister. Each is encouraged to take a hands-on approach and follow a strategy of involvement, helping children both locally and globally. What follows are a few suggestions based on what others have done. Following are ideas to spark discussion and help stimulate new ideas for ministry to and for children.

- Train everyone who works with children in the church to recognize the signs of possible abuse. This is not a suggestion but a mandatory legal responsibility in most states as is reporting abuse or suspected abuse.
- Have church polices in place regarding child abuse (background checks, response plans, etc.)

- Remember the moral and spiritual responsibility of the Church to protect children does not preclude ministry to abusers (or those accused of abuse) and their families. The Church needs to facilitate self-reporting and be there for all, not abandoning any to the criminal justice system.
- Make the church facility more child-friendly and safe. Ask children and their parents or guardians what they might like to see.
- As a church, adopt a local school and enlist volunteers to help with whatever may be needed.
- Provide back-to-school supplies for the kids and/or help with needed classroom supplies.
- Become a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer in your local community.
- Set up community after school activities or weekend events for kids and/or youth.
- Identify a need for children in the community and call local leaders together to address it.
- Sponsor students or a church school on a CGGC mission field (Bangladesh, Haiti, India, etc.).
- Partner with local/regional/national/international organizations to address child exploitation worldwide in the sex trade, sweat shops, etc.

## 5. Civil Disobedience

### What Is the Issue?

God calls us generally to submit to civil government; however, what shall we do when Caesar's will runs contrary to God's will?

### What Does Scripture Say?

Scripture provides numerous examples of conflicts between God's people and civil authorities as well as instruction on how to handle those conflicts. Christians are called to obey, honor and respect civil authorities because God has placed them over us (Romans 13:1-7). When the Pharisees questioned Jesus on whether it was appropriate to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus told them to "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17).

Exodus 1 provides the first example of civil disobedience when the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill newborn boys. In Daniel 1, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to eat meat sacrificed to idols in violation of God's law, but are able to negotiate an agreeable solution with King Nebuchadnezzar's official which allowed them to obey Jewish dietary laws. In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respectfully refuse to obey King Nebuchadnezzar's decree that they worship a golden image of the king. Given the choice of abandoning worship of God and death in a fiery furnace, they obey God, choose the furnace and are saved from the fire. In Daniel 6, Daniel continues to pray to God in violation of the law and is thrown into the lion's den as punishment, where God saves him.

There are also several similar examples in the New Testament. In Acts 4:1-22, Peter and John publically preach the Gospel and are threatened by the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5:17-41, the Apostles are beaten by the Sanhedrin for preaching the Gospel. In both cases, the Apostles continue to preach. In Acts 16:16-40 Paul and Silas are arrested, beaten and jailed for offending local custom by preaching the Gospel and casting out a demon. While in jail, an earthquake destroys the jail, but they do not escape, allowing them to convert the jailer. Paul and Silas announce themselves as Roman citizens in order to make use of their additional freedoms allowing them to continue their missionary journey. In Acts 24 and 25, Paul is placed on trial and appeals to Caesar in order to continue to spread the Gospel.

### How Do We Understand This?

We believe that the Bible teaches a process to address situations in which civil authorities force the Christian to choose between obeying God or man. Because there are many different situations in which conflicts could arise, this article will not address any specific conflict. Rather, it will seek to provide a framework Christians can use to address such conflicts with civil authorities.

Is this a matter of imprudence or a matter of immorality? In the world of politics and government there are many things government officials may ask us to do that we find to be foolish policies, yet there may not be anything immoral about obeying the foolish law. Before a Christian considers refusal to obey the law he should ask himself why he does not like the law in question. If it is just bad policy, the Christian should obey and seek remedy through the political process. If obedience to a particular law would be sinful, the Christian should seek accommodation through Caesar's agent. As Daniel did, we should seek out the official or officials tasked with enforcing the law and seek a mutually agreeable solution to the conflict.

Christians should utilize the legal process to protect their rights under the law. Like Paul, we may seek judicial remedies to protect ourselves from officials who may seek to compel us to violate our

conscience. If that is unsuccessful, we may appeal to ensure that we utilize our rights in furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

As a last resort, Christians should respectfully refuse to obey Caesar and instead obey God. There are occasions such as those encountered by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the Apostles where it is impossible to obey both man and God. Occasionally God's people must choose between man and God. Our response should be like Peter and the other apostles when they replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). Choosing God over man may result in temporal punishment, but will result in eternal glory.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

Throughout history, Christians have been ostracized, fined, jailed, beaten and killed for following Christ. Some have been persecuted for preaching the Gospel, others for refusing to worship other gods, others for helping the poor, and still others for refusing to take actions or spread ideas that are contrary to biblical guidance. As the people of God we must respond appropriately.

We will pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted.

We will pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

We will seek redress of injustice on behalf of the oppressed.

We will encourage and assist members of congregations as they suffer for their fidelity to Christ. When a conflict arises where we must choose to obey God or obey Caesar, we will seek to find a resolution to the matter by determining whether a conflict truly exists and then by seeking accommodation from the civil authorities.

When there is no accommodation and we must choose whom to obey, may we, like Thomas More declare that we are "the king's good servant, and God's first"<sup>1</sup> and like the Apostles rejoice at being "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

<sup>1</sup> Thomas More was a lawyer, scholar, and politician who was executed for refusing to approve of Henry VIII's first divorce and refusing to acknowledge Henry VIII as the head of the church in England. Thomas More's last words were, "I die the King's good servant, and God's first." [http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/quotes\\_1.html](http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/quotes_1.html).

## 6. The Church's Ministry to Families and Individuals

### What Is the Issue?

In a complicated and changing society, single individuals, married couples and families are in danger of not being ministered to by the Church. Three institutions rooted in the Bible and shown as coming from God are the Family, the Government and the Church. The family is in danger of being altered by a secular, changing and non-biblical philosophy which is increasingly being encoded into law.

### What Does Scripture Say?

Paul gives the rudiments of family life briefly in Ephesians 5:21-6:4. The family is one way God shows Himself to a child (Genesis 4). Love and security come from the parents, providing a picture of the loving nature of God. These concepts are transferred in the child's mind to his or her Heavenly Father. However, many of these concepts are missing in "modern" families.

Paul also discusses singleness as a legitimate alternative to marriage (1 Corinthians 7). Single people, by choice or situation, need to be ministered to by the Church as well. Single people are part of the church family and as such are to be realizing, discovering and using both their gifts and the unique opportunities in the body of Christ. They can be effectively involved in ministry because of their situation and ability to minister in many settings. Single persons can and have lived fulfilled lives in the body of believers. Single people may be young, mature, never married, divorced or living alone after the death of their spouse. Each situation has special ministry needs from loneliness to fellowship and friendship opportunities, as well as ministry involvement.

Single people as well as married persons may need help in how to channel legitimate sexual appetites. Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 25-28, 32-34 and 40. This is an area that has not always been addressed well in the Church in the past.

### How Do We Understand This?

In relation to the family, the Church has much to say that will not be heard from any other sector. Sexuality is good and part of God's creation plan. Intimacy is a gift given to one's spouse (1 Corinthians 7:16). Celibacy is also a gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). The Church needs to support those who choose marriage and those who feel led to singleness and celibacy.

There are biblical principles for successful families which include sexual purity and stewardship, understanding law principles and gospel freedom, holy living, as well as kindness and forgiveness in the family unit and in wider relationships.

Love is non-coercive. A loving relationship is to be mutually beneficial between husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:21, 33). It is to be free of physical or emotional coercion.

While there are different configurations to families in our churches and communities, the idea of same sex unions or marriages is to be biblically resisted as inconsistent with nature, the Scriptures, and reason.

Financial responsibility from a biblical perspective is also important and needs to be taught to parents and modeled for children. This can help with much of the stress in modern life.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

The ministry of the Church to families includes but is not limited to:

- Preparation of couples for marriage using biblical guidelines.
- Biblically based divorce recovery for spouses and children.
- Counseling and specialized referrals for those in troubled marriages.
- Teaching and mentoring when families are blending.
- Parenting workshops and groups.
- Ministry to single parent families. The Church is uniquely positioned to provide an extended family to those who struggle because of death, divorce or abandonment. The body of believers can fill in the voids left by the brokenness of our society in areas of mentorship and inclusion. This is true in many other practical ways as well. This ministry is to both the parent and to the children.
- Helping families living in a non-biblical context move to a biblical understanding and outworking of marriage and family.

There are those in the church who struggle with family as a concept, and sexuality in general. The Church can improve its ministry to those who struggle with the biblical teaching on heterosexual marriage and family.

The Church has opportunities to help those with gender issues to function in victory and holiness. Often to those struggling with heterosexual and/or same sex temptations the Church's ministry appears to emphasize negative or prohibitive teachings. It should be recognized that temptation is not sin, but rather the acting out of the temptation which is sinful. Helping believers to live fulfilled lives without sinning sexually is a task the Church can embrace. The Church needs to hold out the possibility and availability of victory over temptation for both the married and unmarried (James 4:7, 1 Corinthians 6:11).

There are also the future potential families in the Church, for example, college students, young single adults in the labor force, single military personnel, etc. The Church could provide opportunities for young people to meet in a wholesome atmosphere for fellowship and friendship which could lead in some cases to marriage. Teaching about relationships and marriage before young believers are married helps them plan for a biblical relationship. This is also needed for those who are divorced and older single adults as well. Ministry and modeling for blended families is also appropriate. Mentoring couples can learn to help engaged, troubled and newly married couples.

With increasing stress on families and relationships not to mention attacks on Biblical morality, the Church must take the offensive in teaching and modeling biblical marriage and sexuality as well as offering practical guidelines for successful living as couples, families and singles.



## 7. The Disenfranchised

### What Is the Issue?

Throughout the history of the United States it has been a nation of immigrants; people coming to get a fresh start. Sometimes people came to flee tyranny, oppression, and religious persecution; sometimes to escape war, famine, and disease to find economic and educational opportunity; sometimes people came unwillingly as slaves or indentured servants. This has been the American story since the beginning and is a part of this nation's strength and character.

But many who have come have found oppression, discrimination, neglect and abandonment. Despite decades of civil rights efforts, deep racism persists. In these economically turbulent times, jobs have been lost and families have become impoverished and homeless. Persons, particularly women and children, are pursued by predators. Despite the glory that is America, many within its borders are disenfranchised; often without advocates and defenders.

### What Does Scripture Say?

"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name" (Deuteronomy 10:18-20).

"The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Psalm 146:9).

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:34-40).

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:17-20).

### How Do We Understand This?

It is the responsibility of the Church to work for justice, basic human rights, fairness in employment, respect for all people, and equal access to opportunity. It is every Christian's responsibility to provide assistance to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the lonely, the abused and abandoned—wherever and whenever they are found and whoever they may be.

### How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Each local church has a distinct mission field. In order to carry out our responsibility we should:

- Be knowledgeable of the economic conditions and needs of our communities.
- Be attentive to the conduct of our public officials, educators and law enforcement.
- Advocate and support laws that are just and fair and consistent with our values from Christ.
- Come to the aid of those who have fallen victim to economic conditions, natural disasters, the sin-generated prejudices of their fellow citizenry, and the injustices of those in power.
- Work for civil public dialogue on important issues.
- Advance the work of racial reconciliation.
- Promote the fair treatment of aliens and strangers in our midst.
- Never forget the personal touch of the Church and its people to offer a cup of cold water in Jesus' name (Matthew 10:42).

## 8. End of Life Issues (Including Euthanasia)

### What Is the Issue?

We live in a time of unprecedented health and medical advancement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Having said this, we still live in a fallen world. Some medical advancements and abilities may be used to end life rather than to seek healing or to make those dying comfortable. The ideas of euthanasia and various forms of assisted suicide are becoming more accepted in society and even in the Church. Increasingly societies and nations legislate on these issues in contradiction to the teaching of God's Word. As Christians who affirm the sanctity of life, these developments pose a host of challenges as we assist people in the process of living and dying.

### What Does Scripture Say?

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" ( Genesis 2: 7).

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26).

"It is appointed to each man once to die and then face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

### How Do We Understand This?

Human beings are created in the image of God. Life itself is a gift of God and it is therefore sacred. God is the initiator, sustainer and finisher of life. God is sovereign and is the one who determines our days. Scriptures teach that we are not to commit murder (homicide) and to willfully take a human life is to usurp God's authority. Euthanasia or assisted suicide is self-murder. It is also against our created nature which is to leave these matters in the hands of our loving God.

A distinction could be drawn between prolonging viable life and delaying inevitable death. Palliative care provides comfort for the terminally ill when life-giving measures are withdrawn and the natural dying process is allowed to take its course. While medical technology may provide means to delay death, godly love may choose to allow the dying process to proceed unhindered. For example, when extraordinary measures might condemn a person to exist in a permanent vegetative state, families should be supported if they choose to yield to God's direction. In such cases, we must not hasten someone's death, but be sure they are comfortable until the Lord calls them home.

We live a day of an increasingly impersonal approach to illness and impending death. There is a substitution of technology and information for personal relationships. It should be emphasized that there is a need for personal, face-to-face ministry to those dealing with end-of-life issues.

The Church has an opportunity to become a champion comforting others (2 Corinthians 1:4). It also has a unique place in teaching what scripture says. Life is from God. Medicine may be used to ease pain (Proverbs 31:6); however, assisted suicide and having a person bypass the process of death is prohibited by Exodus 20:13. In addition, medical intervention must not compromise the life of another, as in some forms of stem cell research and treatment.

In our culture, pain is seen as negative and to be avoided. Scripture indicates that there is a value in the process of suffering (Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 12:7-10; Philippians 3:10) and even death (John 21:19; Philippians 1:20-21). In hastening death there is the possibility of missing the mystery of God's presence, will, and comfort at the end of life. It is not wrong to refuse medical treatments which would prolong the length but not quality of life. It is also not wrong to seek those treatments.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

In a day of long life but also of devastating illnesses and life-prolonging treatments how does the Church counsel its people in increasingly complicated issues of life and death? Certainly the Church and its people engage in acts of mercy and comfort toward the sick, the dying and their families, as did Jesus.

In addition, the Church encourages people to:

- Think of eternity in regard to the end of life.
- Write down their wishes concerning life-prolonging procedures in documents like living wills, and advance directives in order to ease pressures on their family members. Explaining and planning for organ donations if applicable can be a way to help families see positive outcomes in their difficult situation.
- Prepare personal financial affairs ahead of time for their families.
- Preplan funeral arrangements if possible. This would include wishes for the service as well as meaningful memories they would like shared.
- Plan for healthcare needs of age and infirmity which may include home health care or nursing home care.
- Address the issue of chronic pain in holistic ways. This would include physical therapy, psychological counseling, pain management options, family discussion, and prayer. The place of chronic pain in choosing medical options and how they would affect longevity is a discussion that needs a spiritual element as well as medical and psychological considerations.

The local congregation and wider Church are invested with the duty and privilege of frequently teaching on these subjects, organizing and utilizing ministries such as parish nursing, and providing competent visitation and hospice ministries for the dying and their families. Grief care would fit here as well. Aftercare and ongoing ministry to families after the funeral, is a necessary task the people of God can be involved in.

## 9. Gambling

### What Is the Issue?

Gambling used to be something about which most people in the Church knew very little. Years ago, public gambling was a relatively rare phenomenon. Casinos, racetracks and gambling venues operated only in the distant Nevada desert and a few USA states or foreign countries with lotteries and/or pari-mutuel betting. Today, legalized gambling is permitted in most USA states and the District of Columbia, not to mention many countries around the world where people live and travel. More people are gambling than ever before, and they are gambling more money.

The momentum seems to be on the side of those who want legalized gambling as a way to supplement governmental revenues. But this often ignores the costs that are associated with legalized gambling.

### What Does Scripture Say?

There are a number of scriptures that speak to the motives that lead to gambling:

“Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow” (Proverbs 13:11).

“A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him” (Proverbs 28:22).

“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need” (Acts 4:34).

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

### How Do We Understand This?

The Bible emphasizes a number of truths that conflict with gambling. The Bible, for example, emphasizes the sovereignty of God (Matthew 10:29–30). Gambling, however, is based on chance. The Bible admonishes people to work creatively and for the benefit of others (Ephesians 4:28), while gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible condemns materialism (Matthew 6:24–25) while gambling promotes it.

Gambling breeds a form of covetousness, whereas the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17) admonishes people not to covet. Coveting, greed, and selfishness are the base emotions that entice individuals to gamble. Christians should be concerned about gambling if for no other reason than the effect it has on the “weaker brother” and how it will affect the compulsive gambler. State-sponsored gambling makes it more difficult for compulsive gamblers to reform. State-sponsored gambling seems to be the panacea for the ills of government to meet its financial obligations.

Gambling destroys the work ethic. Two key biblical passages challenge persons to engage in meaningful work. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23). “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. . . . For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10).

Gambling destroys families. Gambling is a major cause of family neglect. Many of the social costs associated with gambling come from a get-rich-quick mindset. As people get caught up in a gambling frenzy, they begin to neglect their families. Money spent on lottery tickets or at racetracks is frequently not risk capital but is income that should be spent on family needs. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, a person who refuses to care for his family is worse than an unbeliever. Parents must provide for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14) and eat the bread of their labors (2 Thessalonians 3:12). When gambling is legalized, it causes people to neglect their God-mandated responsibility to care for their families, and many of those families then often end up on welfare.

Gambling is a form of state-sponsored greed. Romans 13:4 teaches that government is to be a servant of God, providing order in society and promoting public virtue. Legalized gambling undercuts government’s role and subverts the moral fabric of society through greed and selfishness promoted by a state-sponsored vice.

Since gambling undermines the moral foundations of society and invites corruption in government, Christians must stand against gambling.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

Congregations would do well to reflect on biblical stewardship from the pulpit and among small groups, helping members understand that we are called to manage the Lord’s resources. To gamble neither honors nor glorifies the Lord whose resources are being squandered.

Those who are addicted to gambling and especially their families need both the support and love of the Church. The courage to confront lovingly and to support through intervention and beyond is invaluable. Counseling resources and pastoral care will show the love of Jesus to those trapped in debilitating behaviors.

Some practical suggestions could include one or more of the following actions.

- Host a Gambler’s Anonymous group in the church facility.
- Provide teaching/preaching on fiscal responsibility and the perils of gambling for individuals, families, the church and the community.
- Work with county and/or state agencies as well as local law enforcement to assist in helping families with gambling & related issues.

## 10. Human Rights

### What Is the Issue?

Humans have regularly trespassed against one another. Rather than putting others above themselves, they have chosen to put themselves above others, resulting in tragic consequences. Instead of recognizing the inherent value of every human being, they have trampled upon one another's God-given human rights.

### What Does Scripture Say?

Through the prophet Isaiah, God emphasized the importance of meeting basic human needs by saying, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (Isaiah 58:6-10).

God created each person in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26), and cares for all people, meeting the basic needs of both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He acts on behalf of the poor and weak who are overcome by the strong (Ezekiel 34:17-24, Luke 1:46-55). In Christ, God breaks down every barrier that would separate and divide persons (Galatians 3:28). Through His law, God provides peace and wholeness. He sent His Son as a witness of life as it is intended to be lived, who recognized the human rights of those whom society discarded. Following the Resurrection, Christ rendered all authority on earth to His Church to minister and teach in His name (Matthew 28:18-20).

Even those unfamiliar with God's written commandments know humans are to be treated justly (Budziszewski, 38-39). Paul writes, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (Romans 2:14-15).

The command to love is at the heart of God's approach to the concept of human rights. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, each individual is instructed to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18b; Matthew 22:39b). Furthermore, "Love does no harm to the neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). "If you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (James 2:9).

### How Do We Understand This?

The most basic of all human rights is the gift of *agapé* love, God's sacrificial, self-giving love described by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) and demonstrated by a person who stops and helps a person in need (Luke 10:25-37). All human rights stem from the gift of *agapé* love (Matthew 22:40). *Agapé* love is freely given and freely received. When people sin against one another, they break God's command to love.

The Church, being sensitive to all persons' relationship to God and to one another's needs, must provide for those whose basic needs are not met and must speak on behalf of the poor, the downtrodden, and outcast. The Church needs to be careful that it does not take its definition of human rights from the world, lest it have no transcendent center. The concept of individual human rights has its roots in Scripture, most appropriately, in the word *shalom*. Shalom is usually translated "peace," and comes from a root word meaning "to be healthy, complete, whole, balanced." It describes a life in which one's every need is met, in which a person experiences security, safety and fullness of life, in which one practices justice and is the recipient of justice. Shalom describes life as God intends it to be lived. In the Judeo-Christian perspective all persons are entitled to shalom – and the human rights that make for shalom.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

We respond by obeying God's command to love one another as Jesus instructed on several occasions (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:27-36). Through praying for one another and practicing shalom, we intend to impact people's lives in such a way that they are drawn into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

As the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we promote the cause of human rights while opposing sinful behavior. We can become involved in the political process within our communities, and where possible, in the nation and the world in order to change those systems which may create violations of human rights so that all people may experience justice and the gift of agape love before God.

Some practical suggestions for the local church and/or the Church at large could include one or more of the following actions.

- Regularly pray for the kingdom of God to be made real for all people everywhere.
- Establish forums for people to discuss and comprehend basic human rights such as personal liberty, dignity, and well-being based on God's creative intent (*imago dei*) for all mankind.
- Identify human needs in the local community and intervene as may be appropriate:
  - Open the church facility as a place of refuge for the homeless and needy.
  - Sponsor support ministries such as a food and/or clothing bank.
  - Ask public officials and agencies how the church can help the community meet needs.
- Become directly involved in world mission outreach via CGGC Cross Cultural Ministries and/or another such agency:
  - Adopt and support one or more missionaries, fields, sister churches, etc.
  - Support one or more children in third world situations.
  - Send out work teams to make a difference in the local community and beyond.
- Stand up for the powerless and deprived and oppose injustice and discrimination everywhere by advocating for human rights with public officials and working for needed policy change.



# 11. Human Sexuality

## What Is the Issue?

Human sexuality is a wonderful gift from God. However when misused it can lead to harmful consequences. The result is that many people have become ensnared in a multitude of sexual sins including, but not limited to, fornication, homosexuality and pornography.

## What Does Scripture Say?

God created human sexuality (Genesis 1:27), and instituted marriage (Genesis 2:18, 24-25), for the mutual good of man and woman (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). God forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether premarital or extramarital (Proverbs 6:27-29, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18, Ephesians 5:3). God's word condemns all immoral perversions and distortions of human sexuality, including incest (Leviticus 20: 11-12, 19-21), male and female homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27), plural marriage (Leviticus 20:14), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16), etc.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

## How Do We Understand This?

God created sex for the benefit and enjoyment of humankind; however God ordained rules to regulate sex for our own good. The only divinely ordained and beneficial expression of human sexuality is between a husband and wife within the confines of marriage. Any other expression, whether it be lust, pornography, homosexuality, pedophilia, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or any other form of sexual expression outside of a heterosexual marriage covenant is a distortion of human sexuality as God intended and is forbidden. The misuse of sexuality has been an issue throughout human history down to the present with prevailing cultural views clearly at odds with biblical teaching.

## How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We must be unflinching in our adherence to biblical teachings on sexual ethics. After all, if the Church abandons the truth, it condemns the world to wallow in the lie that sexual expression outside of a life-long covenantal relationship is ultimately satisfying. At the same time we must be humble and supportive as others seek understanding, repentance and healing. This is particularly important as sexual sin is generally accompanied by a heavy burden of shame, guilt and embarrassment which can impede healing.

We must educate children, teens, and young adults about appropriate sexual behavior as they lay the groundwork for behavioral habits that may be with them for their whole lives. We should demonstrate holiness in order to show a good example. At the same time we must not neglect to minister to older members of our congregations as sexual sin can be a temptation for any person whether young or old.

The Church's response to a sexually immoral culture has been to focus on encouraging family and marriage. While this is appropriate, we should be sure to value celibate singleness as well. In the past we have idolized marriage to the detriment of singleness. We as Christians must seek to further incorporate single individuals into our families and into our churches so that they too may experience community.

## 12. Human Trafficking

### What Is the issue?

Slavery is the process by which, through legal or economic means, human beings are treated as the property of another individual or entity. Although slavery is illegal in every nation, modern day human trafficking persists at its largest capacity in history in all nations for all people groups.

### What Does Scripture Say?

As slavery has been a human condition for most if not all of written history, the Bible references its practice and propagation. Indeed, the Bible makes many references to what could be considered the unethical business of slavery among God's chosen people (Exodus 21:1-11,20-21; Leviticus 25:44-46; Luke 12:47; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; etc.). However, the context in which Israel found itself dealing with slavery would have been much different from most historical slave endeavors, and notably different from most Western contemporary references to the term. The nation of Israel had unique social and economic conditions, shaped by its undertaking of God's law. The slaves of Israel were predominately, if not all, voluntary (Exodus 21:5; Leviticus 25:44; Deuteronomy 15:16) and were heavily focused on economic conditions of the slaves or their families (Leviticus 25:39,47; Deuteronomy 15:12). This focus on economic stability can be seen in the people's desire to uphold the law for the eradication of poverty (Deuteronomy 15:4) and the realization that there would still be hard financial times (Deuteronomy 15:7, 9), with special laws to ensure the hardships of those in distress are lessened (Exodus 23:10; Leviticus 19:10) – in essence, to serve the poor. Even while in slavery, bondservants had opportunity to leave (Exodus 21:26; Leviticus 25:49; Deuteronomy 15:12-13,23:15) and Israel as a whole did not practice what many today would refer to as slavery (Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7).

On the contrary, neighbors of ancient Israel and modern day human traffickers practice involuntary, perpetual servitude where worldly power and influence hold persons in deplorable conditions and deprive them of their humanity, an act not of God (Proverbs 22:16; 1 Timothy 1:10). God seeks freedom for his people (Leviticus 25:42) and freedom from slavery to sin (Romans 6:16). All people are equal (Galatians 3:28; Philemon 1:16), made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and uniquely valued (Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Furthermore, modern day human trafficking is a perversion of biblical work (Genesis 2:3; Proverbs 13:4; Colossians 3:23; 2 Timothy 2:6) and sex (Genesis 1:27-28; Proverbs 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20,7:3-5). God seeks earthly and eternal freedom for all people (Galatians 5:1; Luke 4:18). God is a God of justice (Proverbs 21:15; Amos 5:24; Romans 12:19; Isaiah 1:17, 30:18, 61:8; Psalm 37:27-29), and the Church is to be his body on earth (1 Corinthians 12), protecting and defending those who are most venerable (James 1:27; Matthew 18:10).

### How Do We Understand This?

Human trafficking, in both forced labor and sexual exploitation, are perversions of God's perfect creation. In the pursuit of personal ego, power, material wealth, control or other self-elevations human trafficking destroys the humanity of a person and denigrates the image of God in others. This is particularly true of children and young people in desperate situations, where promises of wealth and/or education draw the innocent and unaware into lives of physical and sexual abuse.

### How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Because of the immense complexity of the process and the extensive integration of human trafficking into our world, our response must be multifaceted.

- Crisis Response: Every day thousands of people are forced into or back into slavery. We, as the body of Christ on earth, must seek to be a voice for the voiceless. The unpleasant truth of the situation must be made clear and the urgency solidified. We must encourage and support government and not-for-profit involvement, as well as our own congregations, to combat this injustice in every form it takes with every resource available.
- Care and Reconciliation: We must be a refuge and source of hope for those who have had traumatic life experiences, including human trafficking. Many trafficked victims have been held against their will for many years and may have experienced physical, psychological, and/or spiritual trauma. While many may not realize the depravity of their situations, we ought to seek freedom for them on their behalf nonetheless. Furthermore, we seek not only justice on those who have trafficked in human lives (consumers or suppliers) but redemption. We believe no one is beyond the saving grace of Christ, and want all those who are or have been involved in this trade to be released from the power of sin in their lives.
- Prevention: To most effectively and efficiently combat this trade we must seek to destroy it at its source.
  - Community Development: Many trafficked victims come from impoverished regions or situations. To eliminate the enticing effect of money and education in the recruitment of victims, we seek to develop communities of safety, economic stability, and education for all peoples of the world.
  - Home Grown Morals: Just as adultery begins in the heart, so does the elevation of one person over another. We seek to develop personal, congregational, and community commitments to the image of Christ in man, the value of each individual, and the biblical view on sex. Until the demand for “human products” is diminished, suppliers will find avenues for distribution.
  - Pillars of Stability: The more stable an environment the less likely people will be subjected to human trafficking. We thus encourage stable biblical families, involvement in local bodies of believers, and avenues for ignorance-destroying truth.
- Slave in Christ: As believers in a perfect God, we strive for all persons to break free, not from just earthly chains, but spiritual chains as well. We therefore seek a biblical form of “slavery” with Christ for all people. In His purchase of a debt we cannot repay, we are bought out of our righteous poverty and brought to live as sons and daughters of God. We seek to bring the hope and vision that only Christ can provide to all people.

## 13. Immigration

### What Is the Issue?

The world is coming to America. It has been so since colonial times. The United State is a nation of immigrants drawn here by unparalleled wealth, opportunity, security and freedom. Yet at this time in history, immigration has become a highly divisive political issue given the large number of persons who have entered the United States illegally. The issue is complicated because many have come fleeing increasingly lawless regions, some made so in part because of the demand for illicit drugs by the citizens of the United States. Nevertheless these immigrants raise security and other concerns for this country. Some of the tension is also fueled by the somewhat erroneous belief that jobs are lost, when in fact many jobs taken by immigrants are those many Americans refuse. America is now a global economy fueled by the efforts of peoples from around the world, but the Church is often divided over whether compassion or national security should be a deciding factor in the immigration debate, as if it were an either-or proposition.

### What Does Scripture Say?

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV).

“He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35).

“‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:29-30).

“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to break its seals; for you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9).

### How Do We Understand This?

Christians must remember that they are first citizens of the kingdom of God and their highest goal is to connect people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Given the volatile nature of this issue we must be

sure that our absolute allegiance to Christ and His gospel is not lost or diluted by political philosophy or ideology or language. We should remember that we are aliens and strangers in a fallen world that dwells in darkness. We are called to the salt of moral character and the light of spiritual truth on this and other issues.

The Bible is very clear about the absolute necessity of ministering to and protecting the sojourner, providing for their physical well-being and defending them against injustice. In fact, the Church's default mode is the law of love as demonstrated by Christ which incorporates kindness and mercy.

Christians also believe human government is ordained by God to promote the well-being of a nation; therefore, we should work to support lawful forms of immigration. This means we oppose those who immigrate to this nation for criminal purposes, but should love and welcome those who come for reasons of freedom from political tyranny and/or economic disaster. We should see it as our responsibility to speak out against political solutions that would callously enable these injustices and work to understand and deal with our nation's complicity and contribution to the destitution of others.

We should also see this great migration as the missionary opportunity it is. As God brings people from other nations and religions into our community, we should seek both to understand them and build respectful relationships that enable the process of redemption of their souls.

#### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

Churches need to be in prayer for refugees and immigrants around the world. They also need to identify any who live in their community and reach out to them in the name of Jesus, who himself was once a refugee.

Congregations may seek opportunities to provide sanctuary, financial support and care to the outsider and immigrant. In addition, the churches may sponsor refugees and seek to help them become integrated into local culture.

A congregation may open its doors to worship services and/or Bible studies for individuals/congregations from ethnic backgrounds different from that of the local church.

The Church needs to speak for those who have little or no voice and to support acts of social justice and personal care.

Churches need to support and promote the established legal process by helping immigrants achieve resident status and/or citizenship. They can do so by assisting them with any necessary applications and paper work, and by working for change in the process when and where needed.

## 14. Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Issues

### What Is the Issue?

Culture and many churches and Church groups have adopted the view that homosexual behavior and transgenderism are congruent with God's designs for humanity. What is a proper biblical view of these issues?

### What Does Scripture Say?

God created man and woman to be complementary to one another (Genesis 1:27).

"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this" (Deuteronomy 22:5).

God forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether premarital or extramarital (Proverbs 6:27-29, 1 Corinthians 6:13-18, Ephesians 5:3). God's word condemns all immoral perversions and distortions of human sexuality, including incest (Leviticus 20: 11-12, 19-21), male and female homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:24-27), plural marriage (Leviticus 20:14), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16), etc.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

### How Do We Understand This?

All of mankind has a bent toward sin, and as a result, each person has certain sins to which he or she is particularly susceptible. Free will, while recognizing a person's susceptibility to sin, does not mean one is condemned to commit that sin. Although no biological link to same sex attraction has been found, such a link (if found) could have a bearing on whether a person is tempted and whether it would make resistance more difficult. However, it is ultimately irrelevant to the sinfulness of homosexual behavior because God has given persons free will to choose to partake in sinful behavior or to submit their bodies as a holy sacrifice to him. This free will is given to all regardless of the particular sin that may tempt them.

As with homosexuality, transgenderism revolves around the issue of God as sovereign creator. God has created each person as either male or female. Whether a particular person is male or female is the sovereign choice of the Creator. As Romans 9:20 says, "But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

Each person has certain sins that are more tempting to them than others. For some this may be stealing, for others lying, for others drunkenness, and for others it may be homosexuality or transgenderism. Because of this, we draw a distinction between temptation or urges, and behaviors or fantasies. Simply because a person is tempted by same-sex attraction does not mean that person has sinned. We would encourage those who are tempted by homosexual attraction, just like those tempted by other sexual sin, to flee from it rather than give in to it. After all, as Christians we are not defined by our sin or our temptations, but by our identity in Christ, our risen savior who has given us new life and victory over sin (Romans 7:24-25).

### How Can We Respond (Minister)?

We must first recognize that many LGBT individuals have been hurt by those they love, their families, and even their churches. They have felt the sting of rejection and that rejection has left scars.

That acknowledgement calls us to love LGBT individuals and show them kindness. While there is a time to confront a person with his or her sin, the person must first know that we love them.

As with any other sin, however, we should lovingly call for repentance. After all, it is not love to hide the truth from someone, particularly as it relates to a destructive lifestyle.

Further, we should celebrate and encourage those individuals who experience same sex attraction, yet resist the temptation to act upon those urges.

Most importantly, we must never enable or encourage homosexual or transgender behavior, whether through conducting same-sex “marriages” or some other practice that could be construed to endorse sexually immoral behavior.

As for society generally, we should continue to speak the truth as to homosexual behavior and transgender behavior. In order to do this we must ensure that our congregants, particularly young people, are trained early-on to have a well-reasoned biblical worldview. We will uphold the biblical and natural definition of marriage and encourage repentance from all sin, including homosexual and transgender related sin

## 15. Marriage

### What Is the Issue?

Given the confusion in society regarding marriage, the Church needs to live out the biblical mandate for marriage as the lifelong heterosexual union of one man and one woman, and model that union to society at large while at the same time ministering to the many people affected by broken marriage covenants both inside and outside the Church.

### What Does Scripture Say?

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

“For this reason shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

“What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9).

Marriage was created for the mutual good of man and woman (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Ephesians 5:23-33).

### How Do We Understand This?

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve he defined their relationship by creating the institution of marriage as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. This model of marriage is the ideal cornerstone on which the family and society should rest as it acts as a mediating institution between the individual and government, socializes children, and models the relationship between Christ and his Church. As fallen creatures, however, humankind in many cases has not lived up to God’s plan for marriage.

In modern society marriage has become devalued and redefined. Both divorce and remarriage are common inside and outside the Church. Spouses are abandoned. Many children are born outside of marriage to single parents or suffer through their parents’ divorce. Still others are seeking to change the very definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, polygamous relationships, inter-species relationships, relationships with children, and even relationships with inanimate objects. Some of these alternative models for marriage have been accepted by civil governments and even some Christian denominations and/or local churches.

When God created marriage as an institution he defined its parameters as a lifelong heterosexual union of one man and one woman. No other relational configuration can be a marriage because it does not fit God’s definition. While some individuals, organizations and governments may seek to change the definition of marriage, they cannot do so in any real way. God created marriage, so he retains jurisdiction over its definition. Humans cannot amend marriage any more than they can amend the law of gravity.

While marriage in the Bible is always in the context of male/female marriage, the behaviors underlying all other types of sexual relationships are always clearly condemned as sinful (See Leviticus 20 for example). Polygamy in the Bible consistently leads to family conflict in the case of Jacob, outright immorality in the case of King Solomon, and is clearly a deviation from the model marriage in Genesis 2. It has been argued by some in recent years that monogamous same sex couples should be able to have their relationships recognized through marriage, however this is not consistent with scripture. Where the



Bible addresses homosexual behavior it is always in the negative. Same sex attraction is not a new phenomenon, as homosexuality was well known in ancient cultures. If God desired to recognize homosexual relationships through marriage, one would expect at a minimum some sort of positive treatment of homosexuality and more likely a positive portrayal of a homosexual relationship. Jesus makes no statement on the matter which he surely would have if he wanted to redefine the marriage covenant. The biblical definition of marriage is clear as is its interpretation and understanding throughout Church history.

As for divorce, the Church's ministry in all of this must begin on the preventative side of the issue. One key to a healthy approach or building stable family units is less teaching on the evils of divorce and more preaching on the scriptural mandate for all God's children – and especially husbands and wives – to relate one to another in a Christ-like manner. Pastors and church school teachers need to keep their audiences in mind. Ephesians 5 was primarily written for families inside the Family of God. Jesus' words on divorce in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16 – although relevant to the Christian today – were primarily directed at skeptical, hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees who were attempting to ensnare the Lord in ethical dilemmas. The Christian shepherd is called upon to feed, correct, bandage, and to encourage the flock, not to condemn it. Among the root causes of divorce are such things as selfishness, lust, unkindness, thoughtlessness, irresponsibility, ungodly priorities and laziness. The responsible Christian leader would do better to counter these threats than to beat on the dead horse of divorce.

Because the biblical expectation for marriage is a lifelong union, the Bible only addresses the issue of divorce on a limited basis. Matthew 19:9 says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." Here, the phrase "except for marital unfaithfulness," seems to imply cases where marital unfaithfulness is the basis for divorce. In such a case the "innocent" party is not prohibited from marrying again. Traditionally marital unfaithfulness refers specifically to adultery, but more broadly it can be understood as breaking the marriage covenant and can thus include other elements such as abuse and/or abandonment. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul tells us, "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him... But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." Here is another case where it would appear that remarriage might be permissible. If one takes the phrase, "is not bound," to its fullest possibilities, remarriage in this case may be scripturally justified.

The words of 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 summarize the Christian ideal for husbands and wives who are members of the Family of God. It follows that Christian pastors, teachers, and church leaders are under scriptural mandate to make it known to the Family of God that divorce and remarriage are not viable options to Christian husbands and wives who find themselves in conflict. Beneath this teaching lies the understanding that for couples who are genuinely committed to Jesus Christ, the power for reconciliation is always available. This may mean, at times, temporary separation for the purposes of working towards reconciliation, but even in this situation, parties must remember that they are accountable to their marriage vows.

Having said this, we must also add that there can be no question that divorce is not in God's perfect will for any couple. As such it is a sin, but where there is true repentance there is forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Always with God there is the opportunity for a fresh start.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

As the Church, our role is to present biblical truth to the world at large as well as to our own congregations. Some practical suggestions for the local church and/or the Church at large could include one or more of the following:

We must clearly teach what marriage is and what it is not without regard to prevailing cultural whims.

- Teach/preach regularly on marriage and family needs/issues from a biblical base.
- Intentionally incorporate biblical teaching on marriage and family into the total ministry of the church, especially within youth and young adult ministries.

We as the church must also provide a community that encourages married couples in their relationships.

- Create a ministry of older married couples mentoring younger couples as they prepare for marriage or in their early years of marriage.
- Hold an annual marriage/family retreat for married couples.
- Establish a marriage counseling ministry for the church and the larger community.

We must also provide support and compassion for those who have suffered from divorce, be they the husband or wife, their children or their extended family. The pain of divorce impacts multiple relationships, not just the couple divorcing.

- Sponsor a divorce recovery group in the church and open it to the community.
- Provide training for church leaders/teachers in how to minister to broken family members.

## 16. Material Stewardship

### What Is the Issue?

Humankind has become increasingly obsessed with what it possesses materially and the empowerment that it provides over their lives. This has resulted in increasing attitudes of greed and discontentment. It has led to destructive levels of indebtedness and inflation. It has tied a person's worth to his or her material assets and caused humankind to worship money instead of God. It has often undermined the biblical call to generosity and sacrificial giving.

### What Does Scripture Say?

"Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14).

"The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).

"You cannot serve God both God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matthew 6:31-32).

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:38.)

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed" (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

### How Do We Understand This?

Christians are called to live under the Lordship of Christ, which is undermined by the seduction of materialism. To properly live under the Lordship of Christ, the believer must dedicate everything to Him, including one's body, resources, and lives. Biblical stewardship accepts responsibility to live congruently with the commands of Christ and to conduct one's life based on his values. Christians tithe as a foundation for this Lordship, and giving is never limited by any percentage definition unless it be one hundred percent.

All of one's wealth belongs to the Lord and is to be available for His purpose. As a result believers are to be dependent upon the Lord for all needs. The accumulation of wealth merely to accumulate wealth or to be independent of the Lord is sin.

Christ calls the believer to value persons over possessions, to be intentional, generous and sacrificial in giving, and to live simply so that one's possessions do not possess and so that personal resources are available for the Lord's purposes. This challenges Christians to be careful with debt, lest debt makes one prisoner to another. It also means that to rob another of wealth or possessions, especially to take advantage of one's ignorance or powerlessness, is particularly abhorrent to God.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

The Church needs to teach and to practice the principles of biblical stewardship: particularly on matters of ownership, wise spending, giving, debt, tithing, generosity, etc. To do so the Church should:

Provide financial counseling and mentors to those caught in financial distress.

Practice budgeting and spending based on obedience to God's vision. Building and facility expenses, especially expansion projects, need to be within reason and be weighed against ministry priorities.

Generously reach out with its resources, individually and collectively, to those individuals on the fringes of society who are without life's basic needs.

Give away more than it retains for its own operational needs. This is not always a matter of dollars. Time, service projects, hands-on personal care can mean as much or more as benevolences.

Provide a direct channel for its members to dispossess their accumulated goods either by sponsoring in-house collection and distribution and/or supporting community agencies who do so.

## 17. Nationalism and Military Service

### What Is the Issue?

Should a believer be involved in military service to his or her country?

### What Does Scripture Say?

In the Scriptures there is a body of material which can be taken in differing ways. In the Old Testament we see Abraham going to war in Genesis 14 with his own private army to rescue Lot. As Israel becomes a nation, they are commanded to destroy certain peoples (Deuteronomy 20:16-17). In David's era, it seems there were expected times when kings warred with each other (2 Samuel 11:1). However, at the same time, David urges Israelites to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). Israel had various conflicts and at times God was very involved (1 Samuel 15). It must be noted that Israel was a theocracy, and God was the ruler, at least in theory.

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of peace. It is obvious he speaks of personal peace. However he asks others to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). He also seems to condone self-protection (Luke 22:35-38). Paul uses military language when referring to the Christian life (2 Timothy 2:3-4). However the concept of the Kingdom of God is pervasive in the gospels and the rest of the New Testament. Paul gives a description of this present form of the Kingdom in Romans 14:17. It is described with the word "peace." As the Church grew, the idea of believers as non-resistant became pervasive. The ante-Nicene Fathers Origen and Tertullian as well as Justin all spoke of this. There is also evidence that the early Church included Roman soldiers.

In the Bible the following can be said to be true:

Peace is important to God (1 Corinthians 7:15, 1 Peter 3:11).

Believers are to be first and foremost soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

One day all the kingdoms of the earth will be under the rule of Christ (Revelation 11:15).

The believer's main job is sharing the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).

A believer must have faith in what he or she does. For some the statements of Scripture would convict them not to participate in human conflicts (Romans 14:23).

### How Do We Understand This?

The issues of violence, military service, militarism and wars of aggression, and imperialism have historically not been dealt with well by the people of God. Evil is real and does exist. There are times for the believer to be involved in military service in defense of one's country. There are realities concerning self-defense and defense of one's country. They are pragmatic and they deal with present world conditions. Often Christian denominations simply assume that young men and women will join the armed services and be involved in warfare. This is often even promoted.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century Augustine of Hippo wrote extensively on what has been called the "just war theory." Others have taken this and have formulated "a preventative war" theory. As the Reformation progressed some wanted to look at the Church earlier than Augustine. The Anabaptists, and later some

pietistic movements made non-resistance a test of fellowship. It may be argued that before Augustine, a majority of the Church believed that Christians should not be involved in warfare.

In 1830 John Winebrenner helped begin a solely American religious movement. It was not from Europe, and it severed ties with European-rooted denominations which had come to America. Clearly Winebrenner struggled with what believers in his movement should do on this issue. In 1844 in his doctrinal formulation he states, "She (The Church of God) believes that all civil wars are unholy and sinful, and in which the saints of the Most High ought never to participate." (An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in The United States, [Harrisburg, 1844], p. 181) Winebrenner protested vehemently against the Mexican American War of 1846-1848, calling it a war of imperialism and aggression. Part of his objection was also rooted in the idea that any territory seized might be formed into new slaveholding states.

The Church of God was abolitionist and wanted slavery to end. This non-resistance and desire for justice clashed. By the time of Winebrenner's death in 1860, the tide had shifted and the younger leaders in the Church felt that while abhorrent, a civil war was the only way to settle the issue. After this time the original statement of Winebrenner disappeared from new formulations and held little sway in the Churches of God.

The question of military service however is still important. There is a difference between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism is a love for, a pride in and loyalty to one's country. Nationalism may lead to a blind allegiance to one's country's policies and often a support of expansionism and imperialism. It may include oppression of another people group or aggression against another country. Patriotism can be very constructive, but historically nationalism often leads to war, invasion, oppression and even genocide.

The key question is: "Should believers in Christ be involved in sectarian wars?"

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

Many conflicts have admirable goals such as national defense or opposition to repressive and aggressive regimes. Some do not. When a person takes the military oath, they promise to obey orders. This could be problematic for believers. While in the end, this is a personal choice, the idea of the sanctity of life, the Lordship of Christ, and the idea that we are to give life and not take it are all areas to think about in relation to military service.

It seems given scripture and history, in the event of war or a national draft the Church would look at the conflict carefully. The Churches of God holds to a free conscience position on military service which is to say that the decision whether to serve in the armed forces or not is personal and not a matter of Church policy. In the past the Church has supported those who felt they could not participate in a combatant role. This could and has been defined as supporting those choosing to be conscientious objectors. In like manner the Church is also encouraged to pray for and support those who choose to participate. As believers in the case of war, those who object on scriptural grounds have opportunities and are even duty bound to help the victims of war in non-combatant service. The chaplaincy is another opportunity to aid those involved in war, in a spiritual and non-combatant role.

The Church also has a tremendous opening into the lives of those who return from war. Physical wounds and lasting injuries, psychological effect such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other results

of war call for ministry in a variety of ways. These include employment, counseling, therapy, friendships and a variety of practical helping ministries involving everyday life.

It is important to urge our people not to “go with the flow” of the emotional moment when an act like 9/11 happens. It is important to seek God, and see how we can be peacemakers and pray for guidance in what our individual and national response should be. Hatred and revenge are inappropriate responses for believers.

Finally, while it is the job of the secular government to protect its citizens, how a believer should be involved in what could quickly become evil is a question which requires deep thought and prayer. Believers are called citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20). This citizenship should make us think deeply about our place in the conflicts of this world. Whatever a believer decides in relation to military service should come after much prayer, counsel and earnest thought, concerning how best to glorify God.

## 18. Natural Resources & the Care of God's Creation

### What Is the Issue?

The natural world is more and more at risk due to man's poor care of God's creation.

### What Does Scripture Say?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:1, 31a).

"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:7, 15).

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:4-8).

"The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man" (Psalm 115:16).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

### How Do We Understand This?

In the words of King David in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." God made it and as the creator everything belongs to him. And yet as the texts above indicate God entrusted the use and care of the earth to humankind. The natural world is nothing short of a sacred trust. In all trust arrangements the trustee (in this case humankind) is accountable to the real owner (God) for the stewardship of the trust (the earth).

Sadly the human record of earth care shows a definite negative balance, especially since the beginning of the industrial revolution in the late 1700s. Even before that the abuse of the environment was evident. The extinction of species, diminished habitats, fouling of the waters, Chernobyl, light pollution, etc. all put mankind's trust in the red. Good things have happened such as preservation in parks around the world, better agricultural practices, recycling trends, and the like, but more is needed to put the trust back in the black. Of all people, God's people understand this sacred trust and the ultimate accountability factor. So, the Church needs to be in the forefront of environmental conservation and the stewardship of natural resources, especially since Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all.

### How Can We Respond (Minister)?

It is important the Church avoid the politicization and polarization the conversation on the environment sometimes engenders. Individuals can and do hold varying views regarding "climate change" which is a personal prerogative, but of all people the Church needs to serve as caretakers in the garden of the Lord. Corporately and individually she can make a difference by taking a pro-active approach.

- Promote environmental awareness in the teaching/preaching ministry of the church.



- Encourage recycling and set up internal church systems to do so. Almost anything can be recycled, reused or repurposed: Bibles, books, clothing, furniture, literature, toys, etc.
- Discourage or minimize the use of Styrofoam and other products that are not recyclable and end up in a landfill. Instead use biodegradable products (cups, plates, etc.) and/or reusable ones.
- Teach people to make a personal difference by not trashing the environment and by picking up after those who do. Provide waste cans around the church and community for people to use.
- Promote and participate in community and roadside litter and trash pick-up opportunities as individuals and/or a church. Adopt a highway, neighborhood, street, house, etc. and clean it up.
- Turn the church property into a “Garden-of-Eden” to inspire appreciation for flowers and plants.
- If space allows, sponsor church member and/or community gardens on church property. Produce can be used as mission outreach or to benefit members. Include all ages in the project.
- Sponsor and host organizations that promote environmental awareness such as scouting troops.
- Utilize hiking, camping, and retreat events to get all ages out into God’s creation.
- Support as may be appropriate organizations devoted to conservation and environmental issues.

## 19. Wellness and Self-Care

### What Is the Issue?

We live in a fast-paced society with demands and high expectations. We live in a society that has largely abandoned the Creator's rhythm of work and Sabbath rest. It has taken its toll on our health, relationships, and spiritual well-being as individuals; not to mention the cost to our society in productivity, economy, and community.

### What Does Scripture Say?

"By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:2-3).

"Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work...'" (Deuteronomy 5:12-13).

"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'" (Mark 6:30-31).

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

### How Do We Understand This?

We believe that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, not simply in the spiritual sense but in the physical, as well. God is the Giver and Sustainer of life and we are called to be good stewards over our physical bodies. In a fallen world there are many afflictions that we must face which undermine our health.

One is diet. God has created our bodies to function with proper nourishment. Our propensity to foods that pleasure us often create unhealthy side-effects in our cholesterol, our blood sugars, our heart and circulatory systems. This leads to excesses and breakdowns that damage our bodies unnecessarily. We believe it is important to eat wisely.

Another is alcohol, tobacco and drugs. The scriptures teach moderation in some cases and abstinence in others, especially with regard to those things which have the potential to impair our judgment, alter our moods, and lead to addictions. In addition, the use of some of these things results in breaking the law. In such cases we have a particular moral duty not to use these substances and to oppose their sale and distribution.

The third is lifestyle. Genesis 1 clearly teaches that unrelenting work is destructive to mind, body and spirit. Sabbath is a command and a life principle of the Word of God that has been long neglected in our culture resulting in damaging stress, broken relationships, and physical harm.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

We believe that the Church must once again teach the principles of wellness, wholeness, and self-care taught in the Word. For example, we should teach our people the necessity of Sabbath as an opportunity to rest and worship. With Sabbath is a commitment to abide in Christ for spiritual and emotional healing and restoration. In addition, we must work within society to support Sabbath rest. This may mean choosing not to shop or dine out on Sunday, refraining from Sunday labor, weekly fasting from electronic media, or other means that create a rhythm of rest and worship against the intensity of the week. In no way is this response meant to become a new legalism; however, the discipline of sacrifice may provide opportunity to be restored and hear again from the Lord.

Recent research has affirmed that the human body does not easily process refined sugar, white flour or artificial sweeteners. To limit these in one's diet may provide more energy, better sleep patterns and a healthier life. Again, this is not meant to be observed legalistically, but gratefully embraced as a gift from God.

A congregation could develop a wellness ministry, offering blood pressure checks; teaching CPR and First Aid; providing an AED (automated external defibrillator) in the church building and teaching persons how to use it; teaching healthy eating habits; teaching stress management skills; and providing exercise classes. While these are offered elsewhere in the community without a Christ centered focus, among the Body of Christ they become a reminder that the human body is the temple of God and must be so respected.

We believe the Church should look seriously at itself, at expectations and schedules which cause us to encourage unrelenting activity which undermines the ability of our people to engage in personal Sabbath. Helping persons creating sufficient margin supports an individual's ability to process stress and be better able to face the challenges of daily life.

In addition to spiritual transformation practicing the spiritual disciplines provide opportunity to develop physical and emotional health and well-being. The congregation should be regularly taught and encouraged to practice spiritual disciplines.

## 20. Women in Ministry

### What Is the Issue?

The role of women in ministry is affirmed by some and rejected by others in the Church. So, what is the biblical position as taught by the Churches of God?

### What Does Scripture Say?

In the Old Testament women served as leaders and in ministry roles. Some examples include Deborah who served as a prophetess (Judges 4:4-5), and a judge (Judges 5), as well as a military leader. Other women who also served as prophets include Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). In the New Testament women were noted for being prophets as well. The list includes Anna (Luke 2:36-38) the confirming witness to the Messiah, and the four unmarried daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). Other prominent women in leadership include Lydia (Acts 16) who hosted a Church in her house, Damaris (Acts 17), Priscilla, Dorcas, Julia, Phoebe, Lois and Eunice, among others. In Romans 16 the Apostle Paul includes a number of women in his list of people to be commended as Church leaders.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).

Several problematic passages must also be considered in light of women being in positions of leadership in the Church.

“As in all the congregations of the Lord’s people, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14: 33-35).

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:1-3).

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6).

### How Do We Understand This?

If the number of women leaders named in the Bible were only a few, they could be considered exceptions to the practice of women not being in positions of leadership and ministry. However, with the large number listed, it seems clear that women can and should be expected to serve in positions of leadership and ministry.

The number of women who appear in Jesus' ministry is large and important: Mary, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, the woman who anointed Jesus, the woman at the well in Samaria, and the woman caught in adultery, among others. Women were the last people at the cross (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41) and the first at the gravesite (Mark 15:46-47, 16:1-6; Luke 23:27-28, 23:49, 23:55-56, and 24:1-10). The first to whom the risen Lord appeared were women (Mark 16:9; John 20:14-18).

In Galatians 3 the Apostle Paul makes a clear reference to all people being the same in relationship to their standing with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ, there is no difference among gender, culture, economy, or geo-political boundaries. This speaks directly to the issue of saving grace, but it bears huge implications for ministry in the Church. This is a refutation to the common prayer of a Jewish man, "I thank you God that I am not a heathen; I thank you God that I am not a slave; and I thank you God that I am not woman."

The passage from 1 Corinthians 14 is one of the most used texts to keep women quiet. It is important to see this text in light of Paul's earlier comment in 1 Corinthians 11: 5-6 which says, "And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head." It seems acceptable for a woman to pray or prophesy in public based on this text, only to be refuted later in the fourteenth chapter. Since scripture is not contradictory to itself, it must mean that women are given the right of speaking and praying, but regarding idle chatter they (and men) should remain silent during public worship. It would be a misinterpretation to use the text from 1 Corinthians 14 as a general rule requiring women always to be silent.

It is very likely that Paul's admonition arose from the fact that the men and women were seated separately in the early church, as was the custom in Jewish synagogues and which provided the organizational model for the early Church. It would be improper for a woman to call out to her husband as to what the speaker meant during the service. She should remain silent and inquire of her husband while at home.

Both the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 say essentially the same thing. The issue at hand is more about polygamy and fornication versus monogamy than about the gender of the elder. The elder or overseer must be married to only one spouse at a time. Polygamy and fornication were rampant in the Roman society in which the early Church existed. Such immorality was not to be practiced in the Church. The reason the Apostle Paul addresses the issue in a masculine context in these texts is because of the constraints of language and society in that day.

The passage from 1 Timothy 2 is a carryover from both the Jewish understanding of the role of women, i.e., a woman cannot be a priest, which in the Church is refuted by the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-5), and the Roman role of women. Generally women in Roman society were not allowed to engage in public debate or speech, nor could they hold public office. Part of the issue in this text is that the position of superiority and inferiority based on the fall after sin entered into the world. When Jesus comes and gives life to the Church, he breaks the power of the curse and re-establishes the relationship as intended at creation. That is to say male and female believers are equal partners in God's work, just as they were before humankind fell.

Nevertheless, women in the first century were often not educated; therefore, women needed to learn before they could teach (Witherington, "Why Arguments..."). Hence Paul speaks out against

presumptuous women who are in no position to teach anyone. The supposition that Paul is prescribing proscription for all women in key leadership roles would violate his own practices, not to mention the early Church's experience in shared ministry (Philippians 4:2-3; Acts 18:24-26).

The Church needs to keep steadily in mind that which determines or should determine its leadership is not gender but rather the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. The family of faith is not identical with the physical family, and gender should be no determinant to leadership in the Church. Gender, of course, does affect some roles in the Christian family, but that is irrelevant when it comes to the discussion of the leadership structure of the Church. This is why it is not surprising to find in Paul's letters examples of women teachers, evangelists, prophetesses, deacons, and apostles.

Paul is not interested in continuing the existing fallen patriarchal order and calling it good. One of the signs of Paul's views on such matters can be seen in what he says about baptism. It is not a gender specific sign that the Church has for the new covenant (unlike the one for the old covenant), and Paul adds that in Christ there is no male and female, just as there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free. The implications of this are enormous. The sign of the new covenant signals a change in the nature of the covenant when it comes to the leadership roles which are now fully open to men and women in the Church (Witherington, "Why Arguments...").

The problem in the Church is not strong and gifted women. All good leaders are needed and were it not for capable women, many churches would have closed long ago. Sadly, the limitations and prohibitions for women leaders in the Church often arise from weak men who feel threatened by strong women and who try by various means, even dubious exegesis, to prevent them from exercising their gifts and graces in the Church.

### **How Can We Respond (Minister)?**

In the Churches of God women have been credentialed for ministry since 1858 when Mrs. Martha Jane Beecher was licensed by the West Pennsylvania Eldership (Forney, *History*, p. 400). At about the same time there was also a Miss Johnson credentialed in the Michigan Eldership. Down to the present time many other women have been credentialed for ministry in the Churches of God, General Conference. It is important for the Church to encourage all people, regardless of gender, to pursue the call of God in their life. Certainly women of God today should be permitted and encouraged to serve under God's calling with the Spirit's gifting in the same capacities as Christian women in the first-century Church did.

The following ideas are given as possible starting points to foster and enhance the ministry of women in the Church.

- Teach the congregation what the scriptures say about women in leadership.
- Regularly invite women to speak and preach for the congregation who serve as role models of Christian leadership to all.
- Lift-up biblical/historical examples of women leaders in the preaching/teaching ministry.
- Recognize church leadership, including the women who serve in whatever capacity.
- Include women at every level of congregational leadership: Administrative Council, commissions, committees, etc.
- Encourage all youth and young adults regardless of gender to participate and lead congregational ministries, mission trips, community outreach, Bible School, etc.
- Challenge individual girls and boys one-on-one to consider God's call on their lives.

- Publically pray for the Lord to raise-up girls and boys, men and women into his work during Sunday worship and weekly prayer services.
- Post pictures around the church facility of prominent male and female Christian leaders (past & present, local & global) to inspire and challenge people to follow their example.

## Selected Resources

### Adoption

Bernheim, Gilles, Chief Rabbi of France. Translated by Ralph Hancock. "Homosexual Marriage, Parenting, and Adoption." *First Things* no. 231 (March 2013): 41-50. Accessed June 9, 2015. *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost*.

### The Care of Children

National CASA Association: [www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org).

### The Church's Ministry to Families and Individuals

*Baker Handbook of Single Adult Ministry*, Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1997.  
"Single Adults, A Population too Large to Ignore" by Dennis Franck in *Enrichment Journal*, Summer, 2000.

### End of Life Issues (Including Euthanasia)

[christianlife resources.com/endoflifeissues22](http://christianliferesources.com/endoflifeissues22)

### Human Rights

J. Budziszewski, Ed. Jeffery J. Ventrella, *Natural Law for Lawyers*, Nashville: ACW Press, 2006, 38-39.

### Nationalism and Military Service

*War: Four Christian Views*. Robert Clouse, ed. Inter Varsity Press, 1991.

Holmes, Arthur F. *War and Christian Ethics: Classic and Contemporary Readings on the Morality of War*. Baker Academic, 2005.

*War, Peace, and Christianity: Questions and Answers from a Just-War Perspective*. J. Daryl Charles. Inter Varsity Press, 2010.

### Natural Resources & the Care of God's Creation

Stott, John. *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling*. IVP Books, 2014.

### Wellness and Self-Care

Warren, Rick, D. Min., Daniel Amen, M.D. and Mark Hyman, M.D. *The Daniel Plan*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013.

### Women in Ministry

Forney, C.H. *History of the Churches of God in the United States of North America*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Publishing House of the Churches of God, 1914.

McKnight, Scot. *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010.

Witherington, Ben. "Why Arguments Against Women in Ministry Aren't Biblical," June 2, 2015, [www.patheos.com/bibleandculture2015/06/02](http://www.patheos.com/bibleandculture2015/06/02).



**Appendix:**  
**Past Churches of God, General Conference**  
**Position Papers and Statements of Resolution**

**Winebrenner's Twenty-seven Points** (First published in An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in The United States, Harrisburg, 1844, pp. 179-181)

**Teaching & Practices Publications**

(Yellow Book - First published c. 1940)  
(Green Book - First published 1959)  
We Believe: (Blue Book - Approved by 1983/1986 General Conference sessions)  
Document on Healing for We Believe consultations of September 1985  
(Updated We Believe - Approved by 2013 General Conference session)

**General Conference Actions**

Adopted at the 42<sup>nd</sup> session in 1977: Published as Concerns Confronting the Church, 1977

Institutional Life of the Church  
The Family of God Concept  
The Church and the Churches of God  
A Beginning in Church Growth  
Recruitment for Ministry  
The Church and the Church College  
The Role of Women in the Church  
Reflecting Jesus: Woman's Work?  
Responsible Discipleship  
Ministry to Families and Persons  
Family Life  
Divorce, Remarriage, and the Church's Ministry to Divorced Persons  
Abortion  
Our Responsibility as Christians to Care for Our Bodies  
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs  
Gambling  
Aging  
Handling the Dying Process  
Ministry to the Larger Community  
Christian Citizenship  
World Hunger

Adopted at the 43<sup>rd</sup> session in 1980: Published as Challenging Today's Dilemmas, 1982

The Peace of the Church  
Concern for Authority  
Maturity in Money Matters (Family Financial Planning)  
Jesus and Other Single Adults  
Ministering to the Charismatic  
Checking the Cults  
The Use and Abuse of Television (see 1988: Balancing Your Life)  
Abstinence – To Be, or Not To Be?

The Church and the Prevention of Drug Abuse  
The Case for Marriage  
The Church and Homosexuality  
The Right to Live-The Right to Die! Who Decides?  
The Energy Crisis

Adopted at the 45<sup>th</sup> session in 1986: Published as Reaching Beyond Ourselves, 1988

Balancing Your Life  
Lonely in the Crowd  
Single-Minded Ministry  
Human Rights  
Choices (Concerns Abortion)  
Christian Sexual Ethics  
Injured Innocence (Concerns Child Abuse)  
White Fist, Black Face (Concerns Apartheid)

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## **Ministry Review**

Each year the CGGC asks each church to complete an annual Ministry Review.

The current year's printed Ministry Review is provided on the following pages.

# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review



**Churches of God**  
General Conference

**The 2024 Ministry Review is here!**

We are asking all churches to fill out the Ministry Review and send it back to the address below.

**Please return by March 1st, 2025**

**Don't want to hassle with mail?**

Fill out the Ministry Review online at [www.cggc.org](http://www.cggc.org)

Or at the QR Code



700 E. Melrose Ave. • P.O. Box 926 • Findlay, OH 45839

Phone (419) 424-1961 • Fax (419) 424-3433

[www.cggc.org](http://www.cggc.org)

# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review Introduction

**PLEASE READ:** We have designed this ministry review to be read and filled out by **the pastor and the elders** in a meeting, where discussion and collaboration can happen. This Ministry Review is not meeting its core purpose if it is only filled out by a single person.

## **RATIONALE**

Over the last few years, the General Conference office and regional leadership have heard consistent feedback concerning the length of the Ministry Review, and we've heard questions about its usefulness. In response to this feedback, we've made rather large changes to the Ministry Review including its design, the questions it asks, and how you fill it out.

Below you'll find a rationale for this review's design, namely: fostering relationships, increasing accessibility, and contextualizing questions.

## **FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS**

First, one of our goals is to use this Ministry Review as a tool to help foster relationship between churches and their regional leadership. Regional leaders are best equipped to understand the culture of their region and should have positive relationships with pastors in their region, and we hope this new ministry review can be used as a tool to foster a greater sense of unity and co-operation for God's Kingdom.

We also think the relationships within a church are very important, which is why we've stressed at the top that filling this Ministry Review out as a leadership group is most effective. We hope that pastors, elders, and other leaders can come together to review the ministry efforts of the past year, and together, forge clear goals for the future. We hope this promotes investment not only from the pastor, but from all kinds of leadership in the church.

## **INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY**

Second, we hope to make the new Ministry Review more accessible and easier to use by reducing length, and by cutting redundant or unfit questions. By trimming off sections like this, we hope to save the local church time and energy, while also encouraging you to fill out the whole Ministry Review. Likewise, we have tried to sharpen the focus on the Ministry Review, so while it is not as encompassing as it was in the past, this new direction should make it more useful to the local church, the regions, and the denomination as a whole.

## **CONTEXTUALIZING THE QUESTIONS**

Finally, our goal was to create questions which allowed churches to be specific about their context. This is why the new Ministry Review starts by asking about the local church's vision and the different ways they are pursuing or meeting that vision. We recognize that in our big vision of maximizing our collective potential for Kingdom impact, there is a lot of room for different local visions that all add up to Kingdom impact.

# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

\* Indicates required question

Email \*

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Ministry Review Primary Contact Person Full Name \*

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Name of Church \*

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Church Address \*

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Primary Church Phone Contact \*

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Church Region \*

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How many individuals helped fill out this 2024 Ministry Review? \*

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## Vital Connection

We die to self and grow to maturity through meaningful relationships.

1A. What is your church's vision or mission statement?

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# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

1B. Does your vision or mission statement have metrics that are actively measured? *Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

2. What impedes your congregation from succeeding in your mission and vision.

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3A. What areas of Christlikeness are you most focused on developing in your congregation in the next year?

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3B. How will you know if you are successful in developing these areas?

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# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

4. What will your leaders and disciples need from you to grow in the next year? -

EXAMPLES: Mentorship, coaching, leadership opportunities, training, etc.

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5. What is the church doing so that congregational members feel like they are a meaningful part of their communities: congregational, local, and global?

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## Total Participation

We are all qualified and commissioned to make disciples.

6. How many total church members did you have in 2024?

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7. What is the typical number of ministry participants across all congregation activities weekly? - (Count how many of your people are actively involved in a ministry of some kind each week. Don't count a person twice if they serve in multiple ministries)

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## 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

8. What is the average weekly attendance of your worship service(s) in 2024?

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9. What percentage of your congregation is taking a leadership role in the congregation or church community?

*Mark only one oval.*

0-5%

6-10%

11-15%

16-30%

31-50%

+50%

10. What percentage of your congregation gives financially every year? *Mark*

*only one oval.*

0-20%

21-40%

41-60%

61-80%

81-100%

11. Does your monthly offering/tithe exceed your monthly expenses? *Mark*

*only one oval.*

1. Never

2. Rarely

3. Sometimes

4. Mostly

5. Always

# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

12. Does your congregation participate in communion? If so, how often?

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13. Does your congregation participate in feet washing? If so, how often?

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14. How many baptisms have you celebrated in 2024?

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## Global Mobilization

We must send the Gospel to places both near and far.

15. What will be your most important global mission field in 2025?

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## 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

16. Are you engaging in online or digital mission and/or community? How?

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17. What missional initiatives do you currently have implemented?

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18. What kind of new missional opportunities are you hoping to develop?

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19. Would you like help from your Region or (Global Reach for global mission work), to develop new missional opportunities?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

# 2024 CGGC Ministry Review

20. What will be your most important local mission field in 2025? -(Single mothers, local schools, feeding the hungry, etc.)

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## Daring Action

We are compelled to risk greatly for and stand secure in God.

21. What was your greatest joy or success in leading this congregation in 2024?

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22. What will be your churches biggest challenge or hurdle in 2025?

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23. What will be your churches biggest opportunity in 2025?

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## Ministry Training Institute

Focus: This is the educational arm of the ERC. We provide training for those being called into pastoral ministry. We also assist the local church in helping to educate its members with Biblical and leadership training. We assist with Discover and Develop aspects of the mission of the Conference.

**Staff Contact** – Dr. Michael Walker, Dean & Director – walker80@comcast.net 717-574-5924  
Jessica Duggan, Registrar - info@ercministrytraining.com

**Chair** – Ed Rosenberry - edwardrosenberry@yahoo.com 717-492-6900

**Resources** – The MTI offers classes for those seeking credentialing in ministry. These classes are available throughout the traditional academic year. They are held in the evening from 6-9 pm and are offered on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday evenings. While we encourage in class attendance, we offer a zoom component for those who need this service due to distance.

Additionally, we offer classes in the local church for lay people to strengthen their service or to develop an area of interest in Biblical studies or leadership training. An example of this might be, “What does it take to be an Elder?”

The Ministry Training Institute works very closely with the Discipleship Commission as well as the Commission on Credentialing and Placement.

At your request the Dean will be happy to meet with you to assess your personal educational pursuits or the needs of the Congregation in which you serve.

MTI also works with the Credentialing committee to enhance the continuing education components in your life.

The Ministry Training Institute also offers occasional educational trips to enhance your ministry. We offered a pilgrimage to Israel and Jordan in 2022 and we anticipate another pilgrimage to Israel in late February 2025. Please contact the Dean if you have interest in participating in this life changing ministry.

We believe that Jesus spent significant time educating and training His disciples (Apostles), and we would be honored to assist you as well!