

Welcome to the Church of God, a Worldwide Association

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CHURCH of GOD
A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Author: David Treybig **Contributing Writer:** Cecil Maranville **Editorial Reviewers:** Mike Bennett, Kevin Epps, John Foster, Peter Hawkins, Don Henson, David Johnson, Doug Johnson, Paul Luecke, Tom Kirkpatrick, Steve Moody, Greg Sargent, Richard Thompson, Don Waterhouse **Design:** Rachel Venish

Welcome to the Church of God, a Worldwide Association

What is the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, like?

What is its history? What is its mission?

What are its beliefs and how are they demonstrated?

How can you become a member?

All Christian churches claim to follow Jesus Christ; but with such a wide variety of beliefs and practices, they cannot all be adhering to the identical teachings that Jesus proclaimed. Contrary to popular reasoning that Christianity would evolve with God's blessing, the Bible says we should "contend earnestly for the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3, emphasis added).

Among the many churches claiming to be Christian, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, stands out as a continuation of the Church founded by Jesus Christ and His apostles. Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus promised that, from the time He founded the Church through His second

coming to the earth, there would always be some believers who would understand and hold fast to the truth. **Though small in comparison to others and persecuted throughout the ages, His Church continues today with the same teaching He and His apostles delivered some 2,000 years ago.**

In addition to speaking of His Church, Jesus also prophesied that many would be deceived (Matthew 7:13; 24:3-5). Paul added that false ministers would "draw away" people after them (Acts 20:29-30; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15), and Peter said that many would follow these false prophets' "destructive ways" (2 Peter 2:1-2). In comparison to these leaders and their followers, Jesus' description of the original group of disciples was likewise prophetic, for He called them a "little flock"

(Luke 12:32). Jesus' Church has always remained small in comparison to others, but Christ has kept His promise. His Church has survived.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Church Jesus founded is its observance of the seventh-day Sabbath from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:2-3; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:42, 44). Just as Jesus, the apostles, and members of the first-century Church rested from work and met on the seventh day of the week (Saturday), this practice continues today as an identifying sign of the Church Jesus established.

The history of the Church Jesus founded

Secular history is not always helpful in tracing the history of the Church described in the Bible, because it focuses principally upon churches that preach “another Jesus” and a “different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4). Note that the name would be the same—people would speak of “Jesus” and things “Christian”—but the message would be different than the one Jesus delivered. Yet through the identifying sign of Sabbath-keeping, we can find historical evidence of the Church Jesus founded, as it survived difficult times of opposition and persecution throughout the last almost 2,000 years. This history continued in Asia Minor and, later, in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Church thrived for a

time in England, but persecution eventually drove some of the believers to the American colonies in search of religious freedom.

Historical records show that Stephen Mumford organized a small group of Sabbath-keepers in Rhode Island. Henry Clarke wrote in *A History of the Sabbatarians or Seventh Day Baptists in America*: “Stephen Mumford came over from England in the year 1664; and brought the opinion with him, that the whole of the Ten Commands, as they were delivered from mount Sinai, were moral and immutable” (1811, pp. 8-9).

Although remaining relatively small, Sabbath-keeping churches expanded into New England and formed in other states in America throughout the next few centuries as well. A group of faithful believers in the state of Oregon incorporated in 1930 as the Oregon Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

Eventually, a small group, pastored by Herbert W. Armstrong, departed the Oregon Conference and incorporated under the name Radio Church of God. Years later, after that organization spread around the world, the corporate name was changed to the Worldwide Church of God. During the last half of the 20th century, the Church made effective use of radio, public campaigns, television and print media to preach the gospel; and God blessed its efforts extraordinarily.

The Church of God, a Worldwide Associ-

ation, is an outgrowth of those efforts and teachings of Christian Sabbath-keeping groups dating back to the time of Christ and the early New Testament Church.

We are committed to carrying out the biblical mandate to preach to the world the truth of God’s coming Kingdom on the earth, to be ruled over by the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ. Our congregations are found throughout the world, and we welcome all who desire to learn about and practice the teachings Jesus Christ gave to His first disciples. **We sincerely strive to submit ourselves to God, seeking His blessing as we continue to preach the gospel and care for those whom God calls.**

The mission of the Church

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and instructed them on the spiritual work to be done. His command was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

This twofold responsibility of preaching the “good news” (the gospel) of the Kingdom of God and of spiritually caring for the called-out disciples (students) of Jesus—teaching them to practice the same authentic truths He delivered to His first disciples—remains the commission

of His Church. This foundational guidance gives direction to the work of the Church and identifies those involved as a continuation of the Church He founded.

Following Christ’s example, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, teaches both changing one’s way of life (repentance) and believing in the same “gospel of the kingdom of God” that Jesus came preaching (Mark 1:14-15; see also Matthew 4:23; 9:35). This message of a literal Kingdom that will be established *here on earth* following Jesus’ return is largely ignored or misunderstood by mainstream Christianity, which instead focuses on “going to heaven.”

And the way Jesus desires His followers to live has likewise been misunderstood, distorted and inadvertently maligned. The true teaching of Jesus remains hidden to most people today. (For more information about the gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus taught, see our free booklet *The Mystery of the Kingdom*.)

This “mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11) continues to be taught today by the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, to all who will hear. And according to Jesus, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). **This is the hope for this hopeless world that is headed toward self-destruction. The end of this age will mark the beginning of a time of peace and harmony under Jesus**

Christ's rule.

The Church of God, a Worldwide Association, recognizes its spiritual responsibility to preach this original and continuing message of Christ to the world. Just as Jesus sent out His disciples with the command "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8), all of our literature and teaching is available to the public free of charge.

The funding to fulfill this commission that Christ gave to His Church comes through the tithes and voluntary offerings of members and supporters. Contributions to assist in providing this priceless information to others are gratefully accepted and are accounted for using the highest standards of financial stewardship.

Biblical beliefs

Another identifying characteristic of the Church Jesus founded is its commitment to Jesus' commands. Instead of accepting the unauthorized changes that crept into Christianity throughout the centuries, God's Church has remained faithful to the instruction of the Scriptures.

As previously noted, those following the teaching and examples of Jesus and the first-century apostles worship God on the seventh day (Saturday). Because there is no biblical authorization for changing the day of worship to another day, those remaining faithful to the original doctrine and teaching of the Church

adhere to this instruction.

Another example of biblical faithfulness is found in the Church's observance of God's annual festivals. While most people claiming to be Christian observe Christmas and Easter, members of the Church of God forgo these humanly devised holidays as the Bible commands (Deuteronomy 12:30; Matthew 15:9; Romans 12:2). Instead of celebrating these days, members of the Church observe the festivals that were established by God (Leviticus 23) and kept by Jesus and the New Testament Church. (For more information on God's festivals, see our booklet *From Holidays to Holy Days: God's Plan for You.*)

Little known to most people, the observance of God's festivals provides an annual overview of God's plan of salvation for all mankind since the time of Adam and Eve. By observing these commanded festivals, we are reminded why Christ died, how we can be forgiven of sin, how we can receive the Holy Spirit, how we can become eternal members of God's family when Jesus returns to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God and how most of mankind who died never knowing about Christ will have an opportunity to hear God's truth and be converted.

Jesus said that many would do things in His "name" yet practice "lawlessness"—ignoring or disobeying the laws He and His Father had given (Matthew 7:22-23).

Based upon our deep love and respect for God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, strives to explain and live the Christianity of the first century as opposed to what has become traditional or popular.

Faith in action

Those who practice the Christianity of the first century form a community of believers around the world. Joined together by authentic biblical teaching and God's Spirit, members of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, attend Sabbath services on Saturday each week to worship God and learn His truth.

Similar to members of the first-century Church who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42), members of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, today enjoy and greatly benefit from worshipping God, being taught from His Word and fellowshiping with others who are likewise committed to worshipping God in "spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

As the Bible instructs, members of the Church do not work on the Sabbath, which begins on Friday evening at sunset and continues through Saturday sunset (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Leviticus 23:32). **The Sabbath is a time for rest and furthering one's relationship with God through prayer, study, attending church services and fellowshiping with brethren.**

Sabbath services include singing hymns

to worship God and hearing messages that explain the original teachings of the Bible. Members bring their Bibles to services so they can read and prove for themselves what God would have them do. Many also take notes so they can better remember and review the concepts covered.

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, members of the Church observe God's annual festivals that progressively explain His plan of salvation for mankind (Leviticus 23). Early in the biblical year, in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ, members observe the Passover (representing His death for our sins), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (reminding us of the importance of eliminating sin from our lives and allowing Christ to live in us in order to avoid sin) and Pentecost (representing God giving His Holy Spirit to those who are baptized and obey Him).

Later in the year, members observe the Feast of Trumpets (representing Jesus Christ's second coming to earth and the resurrection of the saints to eternal life), the Day of Atonement (representing, by fasting, our need to draw closer to God, as well as reminding us of Christ's sacrifice for our sins and looking forward to the binding of Satan), the Feast of Tabernacles (representing the rule of Jesus Christ on earth for 1,000 years) and the Eighth or Last Great Day (representing an opportunity for salvation for all who never had an opportunity to hear and respond to God's truth in this lifetime).

God's annual holy days culminate with the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, festivals that occur over eight consecutive days. Members travel to regional locations to observe this entire period of time, during which services are held every day and members spend time with their families and brethren. This highlight of the year is funded by members saving 10 percent of their incomes for the observance of God's festivals (Deuteronomy 12:10-18; 14:24-26). This festival tithe, saved for one's personal use in keeping God's festivals, is different from the tithe that supports the work of the Church. Members also follow the biblical instruction of giving a tithe—a tenth—of their incomes to support the preaching of Jesus Christ's original gospel and to care for members (Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 23:23).

Throughout the year, additional educational and social opportunities include youth camps for teens, challenger programs and international service projects for young adults, family weekends with seminars and sports, and social events. These programs help members experience God's wonderful way of life and help strengthen their relationships with God and each other.

How is the Church organized?

The Bible teaches that the Church of God is a spiritual body of believers led by God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 4:3-5; Romans 8:9, 16). Each

member has a part to play in the work of the Church, as do the parts of the human body (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). As we yield to God's divine leadership, we collectively grow "into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21).

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church; and as the spiritual leader, He guides and directs His Church throughout all ages (Colossians 1:18). He has also provided human leadership for the Church since the time He walked the earth. "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

The leadership of Christ and the teachable attitude of the ministry and membership are essential to accomplish the preaching of the gospel, caring for congregations and general running of the Church. Within the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, a seven-member Ministerial Board of Directors, which is appointed by the ministry, selects the president and other corporate officers and approves operation managers suggested by the president. Although not directly involved in day-to-day affairs, it serves in an advisory capacity to the administration.

The president and operation managers are responsible for the everyday activities of the Church in the United States and assist and guide the leadership and congregations in international areas. The president, who is appointed for a renewable seven-year term, serves as spokesman for the Church and provides leadership within the Church throughout the world.

In addition to the administration, a five-member Doctrine Committee serves the Church by reviewing material that will be published for doctrinal accuracy and resolving doctrinal questions. A five-member Moral and Ethics Assessment Committee is appointed to act as a self-regulatory body to maintain appropriate standards in the Church.

This organizational structure was established by the ministry of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, to serve members and to provide a means by which the Church can fulfill its biblical commission and follow the biblical command in 1 Corinthians 14:40 to “let all things be done decently and in order.”

How can you become a member?

If you believe God is calling you to a deeper understanding of His truth and you desire to learn more about the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, we will be pleased to answer your questions. **We invite you to explore our website (<http://cogwa.org/>)** to take advantage of the growing volume of educational materials, such as our Funda-

mental Beliefs, Frequently Asked Questions, booklets, relevant and inspirational blogs and our Media Library. Websites featuring these materials are available in English, French and Spanish.

We also welcome your biblical questions. Ministers on our personal correspondence staff will be pleased to respond. Just send us a message via the convenient contact form on our website or via mail. **In the United States, mail may be sent to P.O. Box 1009, Allen TX 75013-0017.** If you'd like to visit one of our congregations, check with our local representative (available under “Congregations” on our website) for details.

Visitors are welcome to any and all resources we are providing, with the assurance that there will be no pressure to join anything. Knowing that God the Father must draw a person to Jesus Christ—that is, open his or her mind to understand Jesus' message and God's plan and expectations (John 6:44)—our pastors and members do not pressure visitors to make a commitment to the Church or try to convince them of things against their will.

What visitors will find are friendly congregations where God's instructions and way of life are gladly shared without coercion in any way. If we can assist you in your spiritual growth and understanding of the authentic Christianity of the Bible, we will be delighted to do so! Please contact us if we may be of help. **We look forward to hearing from you!**