



Our History

The Church of God, with U.S. offices in Anderson, Indiana, began in 1881 as a movement emphasizing the unity of God's people and holy living. Daniel S. Warner and several associates sought to forsake denominational hierarchies and formal creeds, trusting solely in the Holy Spirit as their overseer and the Bible as their statement of belief. These individuals saw themselves at the forefront of a movement to restore unity and holiness to the church. Their aim was not to establish another denomination but to promote primary allegiance to Jesus Christ so as to transcend denominational loyalties.

This movement is not historically related to the several Church of God bodies rooted in the holiness revival of Tennessee and the Carolinas in the late nineteenth century. Although it shares their holiness commitment, it does not emphasize the charismatic gift of speaking in tongues generally associated with Pentecostal churches.

Deeply influenced by Wesleyan theology and Pietism, the church's generally accepted teachings include the divine inspiration of Scripture; forgiveness of sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of the believer; the experience of holiness; the personal return of Christ, unconnected with any millennial reign; the kingdom of God as established here and now; the resurrection of the dead; and a final judgment in which there will be reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked.

Within the church, baptism by immersion is viewed as a witness to the new believer's regeneration in Christ and inclusion in the family of God. The Lord's Supper reminds participants of the grace experienced in the life of the believer. Foot washing is practiced in acknowledgement and acceptance of the servant ministry of all Christians to each other and to the world. These symbolic acts are understood to be affirmative reminders of what God has done in Christ. None of these practices, termed ordinances, are considered mandatory conditions of Christian experience or fellowship.

There is no formal membership. Individuals are assumed to be members on the basis of personal conversion and conduct that supports that conversion experience. This is consistent with the church's understanding of how Christian unity is to be achieved—a unity based on spiritual experience rather than creedal agreement.

The Church of God is congregational in its government. Ministers meet in voluntary state, regional, and national assemblies, and other associations. In North America, the General Assembly, composed primarily of ministers but also including lay congregational delegates, meets in connection with the movement's annual North American Convention held in Anderson, Indiana.

In 1996 and 1997, the General Assembly initiated a restructuring of the work of the national ministries of the Church of God within the United States. The result was the formation of Church of God Ministries Inc. Priorities for the work of this organization are identified by representatives selected from the grassroots church.

In 1891, the movement's first missionary was sent to Mexico. Since those early days, the Church of God has continued to grow into a multinational community of faith. At present, the largest concentrations of U.S. churches are in the Midwest, along the Pacific Coast, and in western Pennsylvania. Average weekend attendance in the congregations of the United States and Canada totals approximately 250,000. There are approximately 2,300 congregations in the United States and Canada. Worldwide, the movement has work in eighty-nine countries and territories representing approximately 7,300 churches and more than 750,000 believers.