

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Assemblies of God is rooted deeply in the powerful, penetrating, and profound work of the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of the Trinity was the initiator of a remarkable spiritual awakening that changed lives through conversion, empowered believers through Spirit-baptism, renewed desire for holy living, and confirmed the Word via the supernatural. Many of those touched by the Holy Spirit's fire in the early part of the 20th century sought out others with whom they had a kindred spirit, like doctrine, and mutual passion for reaching the lost, and thus the Assemblies of God was born.

This movement's history is about people—all kinds of people, ordinary people. What the Apostle Paul penned about the church at Corinth could also describe the pioneers in the early years: *Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things. . .* (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). The early leaders were often lacking in education, financial resources, and social standing. They were ordinary people—flawed, strong-willed, and occasionally misguided. Yet they were possessed by a hunger for more of God. Spiritual dissatisfaction fueled their earnest seeking after God, and in response the Holy Spirit filled all the empty places of their hearts.

Not unlike today, these pioneers sometimes followed the Spirit imperfectly. New “revelations” often shook doctrinal foundations creating a need to find Scriptural bedrock on which to construct a sound theology. Racial issues, particularly between blacks and whites, sometimes surfaced in ugly ways, but at other times and in other places the unity of the Spirit prevailed as people of all races joyfully worshipped together. Aberrant manifestations, supposedly from the Holy Spirit, caused confusion and disorder, but ordinary leaders were used to guide the fellowship through these unsettling issues.

As the movement matured, theological education became a higher priority. Commodious church facilities were provided for kingdom expansion. Pentecostals were no longer outcasts, but found acceptance in evangelical circles. Fresh insight from the Spirit uncovered new means of reaching those far from God. Since 1901 a desire to follow the direction of the Spirit has motivated this fellowship, and the impulse to touch a lost world remains the driving force.

Missions is central to the Assemblies of God story. The earliest outpourings of the Spirit prompted a passion to evangelize. The significance of Pentecost, the Feast of Harvest, was not lost on those receiving their own Acts 2:4 experience. The baptism of the Spirit was interwoven with a witnessing impetus. Missions endeavors were prompted by the expectation of Christ's soon return. Some believed that the tongues sign was given by the Spirit to enable missionaries to evangelize people in foreign lands. The second General Council in Chicago (1914) committed to the daunting, faith-filled goal of the “greatest evangelism the world has ever seen.”

So the historical account of the Assemblies of God from its beginnings to the present time is about the Holy Spirit empowering ordinary people to take the gospel, the “good news”, to those who are desperately in need of a Savior, Jesus.

Chapter 1

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

(1901-1927)

The birth of the modern Pentecostal movement in the United States is generally traced to a small, obscure Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, founded and led by Charles Fox Parham. During the final weeks of 1900, the students were challenged to examine the book of Acts and determine the biblical evidence for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They concluded that the evidence of such baptism was speaking in tongues. Consequently they began to pray for an experience that would be identical to what those at Pentecost had received. *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”* (Acts 2:4).

On January, 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman was the first to receive this Pentecostal blessing. Her daughter recounts that “about 11 p.m. Mother felt impressed to call for the minister and others to lay their hands on her in the Bible way that she might receive the Holy Ghost. Immediately she began to speak in tongues and was filled with great joy . . . Within a few days about 12 more received the Baptism.”¹ Now more than 100 years later, millions upon millions of people can attest to having received the same experience in the Spirit.

Significant Historical Components

The Topeka event was a watershed moment for Pentecostals, but it was preceded by significant historical trends that created a framework of theological understanding for that event. Historian Edith Blumhofer cites four key components contributing to the outpouring of the Spirit at the turn of the 20th century, and subsequently to the beginnings of the Assemblies of God: the fundamentalist component, the restorationist drive, the Wesleyan contribution, and the Welsh revival.²

The fundamentalist component: Men such as D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, A. B. Simpson, and other evangelicals strongly emphasized the verbal inspiration of the Scripture, a doctrinal tenet under attack at the time. They accepted premillennial teaching on the second coming of Christ which propelled their evangelistic efforts. They also preached that the baptism in the Spirit provided power for service. Speakers from the British Keswick Conventions were invited by Moody to teach at his annual conferences in Northfield, Massachusetts, emphasizing the Spirit’s work in developing the inner life. Viewing seminaries as having drifted from adherence to Scripture, Moody founded Chicago Training Institute (now Moody Bible Institute). It trained men and women for practical ministry to common people, and became a forerunner of future Pentecostal Bible schools.

The restorationist drive: Some evangelicals emphasized that prior to Christ’s second coming, the church would experience a latter rain revival which would restore New Testament Christianity with accompanying spiritual gifts. A central figure in the restorationist movement was John Alexander Dowie, who claimed to have the gift of healing, and many indeed were healed through his ministry. The assertion that healing was in the atonement was a key doctrinal emphasis. He established a Christian community—Zion City, Illinois—which drew several thousand people. While he held some extreme views, his emphasis on the restoration of apostolic faith and practice influenced future Pentecostals.

The Wesleyan contribution: John Wesley is well known for introducing the doctrine of Christian perfection which he believed was a second spiritual experience after salvation. “Americans modified Wesley’s original concept that had allowed for both gradual and instantaneous perfection and taught that the experience should always be instantaneous.”³ They referred to this experience by many names: “sanctification, perfect love, Christian perfection, second blessing, baptism with the Holy Spirit. . .for some it included a concept of being endowed with power.”⁴ In holiness camp meetings thousands from many denominations claimed to have received this second blessing. Later Pentecostals would use similar language to describe a second experience distinct from salvation that was evidenced by speaking in tongues.

The Welsh revival: In 1904 and 1905 an unprecedented revival shook Wales with an estimated 100,000 being converted.⁵ A core leader, Evan Roberts, connected this move of the Spirit with Joel’s prophecy as quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17: *“In the last day, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”* So the Welsh revival was seen as linked both to Pentecost and the end times. “From the beginning. . .participants claimed it was only the foretaste of a worldwide renewal.”⁶ Many still did not know that three years earlier the Holy Spirit had already been poured out in a little Bible school in Kansas, sparking a fire that in years to come would blaze around the world.

Key Events

The Topeka, Kansas experience: The students at Bethel Bible School desired to match their fresh biblical understanding with personal experience. Believing that the book of Acts taught that tongues accompanied the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they prayed for and received that experience. Not long after that, Charles Parham, the school’s leader, also spoke in tongues. From there “the revival spread through Kansas into Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas...”⁷ When Parham opened a Bible school in Houston, Texas, one of his students was a black Baptist holiness preacher named William J. Seymour. When the “apostolic faith” revival later broke out in California, Seymour was the key leader.

The Azusa Street revival: In 1906 Seymour was invited to become the pastor of a Los Angeles black mission church, where he began preaching on the baptism of the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, even though he would not experience it himself until later. Church members, unhappy with this new teaching, locked him out of the church, so services continued at a home on Bonnie Brae Street. Eventually the meetings were moved to a vacant building on Azusa Street and the work was named *The Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission*.⁸

This description is given of those early Azusa Street services:

“During the meetings, attendees experienced enthusiastic singing, prayer for the sick, shouting, Spirit baptism, singing in tongues, preaching, times of silence, and persons falling under the power. Some received visions and calls to the mission field. All expected the imminent return of Christ. The services were almost continuous. All was spontaneous, led by the Spirit. Prayer, praise, testimonies, and worship marked the services. The message was given by whoever was anointed by the Lord for that service.”⁹

Word of what God was doing quickly spread. Some attendees traveled to other parts of the country or overseas to testify to what they had seen, heard, and experienced. The publication *The Apostolic Faith* was printed and sent to thousands without charge. Reports in the *Los Angeles Times*, while not complimentary, nevertheless sparked increasing interest in what was happening. And the fires of revival spread.

Like Seymour, many Pentecostals were not allowed to return to their denominational churches. In other cases they had no desire to do so. After having experienced Spirit-anointed services, their churches now seemed spiritually dead. Revival preachers spoke against dry denominationalism, seeing it as one of the causes of spiritual and doctrinal declension. Still others denounced church organization of any kind.

However it became evident that to increase the spiritual harvest, as well as conserve it, some type of oversight of ministers and ministries was needed. Sound doctrine was challenged by every new "revelation." Integrity among ministers was not always apparent, and lack of adequate ministerial training was a continuing hindrance. Some prized independence over cooperation. A clear basis for unity needed to be forged. "By 1913 the more thoughtful believers recognized that some organization of the independent elements could both guard the movement from error and aid its growth."¹⁰

The First General Council: E. N. Bell, along with other southern Pentecostal leaders, was the first to issue a call for a special convention to be held in April 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. *Word and Witness*, the publication of which Bell was editor, cited five reasons for such a meeting:

1. Unity among the churches
2. Conservation of the work at home and on foreign fields
3. Better support for missionaries
4. Chartering with a legal name
5. Bible school training for ministers.¹¹

This invitation to all Pentecostals was met with fierce opposition by those who were biased against denominationalism and/or those who feared that developing organizational structure meant losing their independence to a central authority. Many were motivated by the honest desire to continue in the spontaneity of the Spirit without external systems creating obstacles to that freedom.

In spite of those concerns, the first General Council was held at the Grand Opera House in Hot Springs, Arkansas with more than 300 attending. Four days of prayer and fellowship preceded the business sessions which commenced on Monday, April 6, 1914.¹² Some of the significant organizational steps this first convention took included:

- Agreed to incorporate under the name *General Council of the Assemblies of God*.¹³
- "Agreed to promote a voluntary cooperation that would not affect congregational self-government."¹⁴
- Named E. N. Bell to serve as general chairman and J. R. Flower to serve as secretary-treasurer until the next convention.
- Established Bell's *Word and Witness* as the official communication tool of the fellowship.

- Authorized the credentialing of ministers.
- Recommended two Bible training schools: “one supervised by R. B. Chisholm near Union, Mississippi, and the other [Gospel School] headed by [T. K.] Leonard in Findlay, Ohio.”¹⁵

It is interesting to note, as Blumhofer does, that participating in the first General Council were five men who would later serve as General Superintendent: E. N. Bell, A. P. Collins, J. W. Welch, W. T. Gaston, and Ralph M. Riggs.¹⁶ The foundation was laid, not only for a simple organizational structure, but for the future leadership of the Assemblies of God.

Critical Doctrinal Issues

The newly formed fellowship of the Assemblies of God had not adopted an official statement of faith, but it faced immediate doctrinal challenges. Three areas of doctrine in particular created increasing consternation, debate, and division. A clear position on each had to be taken by future General Councils in session. These issues were:

1. Sanctification and the finished work of Calvary.
2. The nature of the Godhead, i.e. the “New Issue” or “Oneness” doctrine.
3. Tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Sanctification and the finished work of Calvary: Influenced by the holiness movement, a second definite work of grace was consistently taught among early Pentecostals. For instance, William Seymour “set forth three stages in the salvation process. Believers were to be converted, sanctified, and Spirit-filled. These necessarily followed in sequence . . . Therefore, seekers were instructed first to be sanctified and then to be Spirit-filled.”¹⁷

William H. Durham challenged this holiness doctrine taught by many of his Pentecostal colleagues. Durham was pastor of the North Avenue Mission in Chicago where hundreds had been baptized in the Spirit, including E. N. Bell. In 1910 Durham preached on “The Finished Work of Calvary,” declaring “that a sinner’s heart is completely changed at conversion.”¹⁸ The work of the cross united the believer with the Sanctifier. “Holiness of heart and life are essential, but such holiness came through ‘growth in grace’ rather than by an instantaneous experience.”¹⁹

Durham’s position met with strong opposition. Seymour shut him out of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Los Angeles.²⁰ Charles Parham and Durham locked in a bitter war of words. But by 1914 when the first General Council was held, this position on sanctification was strongly held by most of those present, as is evidenced by the fact that the keynote message by Mack Pinson was on the “Finished Work of Calvary.”²¹

The “New Issue” or “Oneness” teaching: In 1913 at an Arroyo Seco Camp Meeting in California, someone had a “revelation” regarding Jesus and the name of Jesus. Over the next two years this supposed revelation morphed into a challenge of the Trinitarian view of the Godhead. It included the necessity of being baptized in the name of Jesus only, and some even taught that unless you were so baptized you were not saved. Some in the Assemblies of God endorsed this “new issue”, while others maintained their Trinitarian position. E. N. Bell’s stance on the matter was confusing because he argued for the Trinity in his publications, but was also rebaptized in the name of Jesus only.²²

By the third General Council in 1915 at St. Louis there were significant leaders on both sides of the matter. After lengthy debate, no final conclusions were reached, and the new chairman, J. W. Welch, called for a fourth General Council for October 1916. In the meantime a committee under the direction of D. W. Kerr worked on a Statement of Fundamental Truths. It clarified the biblical position of the Trinity, rejecting the Oneness teaching. It also enunciated the other primary doctrinal positions commonly held. After much debate, the Statement was adopted, which resulted in many ministers leaving the fellowship. And yet the Statement gave the movement a doctrinal framework that promoted unity, provided theological consistency, and enhanced future stability.

Tongues as the initial physical evidence: Following the Oneness crisis, F. F. Bosworth challenged the accepted position that tongues was the initial physical evidence of Spirit-baptism. Bosworth was well known, having joined Pentecostals in Zion, Illinois in 1906, and having traveled extensively as a healing evangelist.²³ He accepted tongues as a spiritual gift but did not view it as a uniform evidence. In response the fifth General Council in 1917 required that credentialed ministers accept the Statement of Fundamental Truths which included an unambiguous declaration that tongues was the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Bosworth subsequently relinquished his credentials, but nevertheless was allowed to speak when the 1918 General Council considered the issue again. In rebuttal D. W. Kerr eloquently presented the fellowship's understanding of Scripture on this critical distinctive. The Council then decisively reaffirmed their stated position on tongues as the initial physical evidence.²⁴

Early Pentecostal Leaders

The Pentecostal story in the early 20th century cannot be told without the names of key leaders surfacing. God used unique, and sometimes unlikely, men and women to discover Scriptural bedrock on which to build a significant Spirit-filled, missionary movement. But the Assemblies of God does not have a single founder. Many people from a variety of backgrounds contributed to its establishment.

Charles Fox Parham: As previously noted, the move of the Holy Spirit on the students of Parham's Kansas Bible school is viewed as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. But to a great extent it was the culmination of various streams of influence in his life. His healing of serious childhood diseases strengthened his belief that healing was an essential part of the gospel.²⁵ His tour of key ministries headed by leaders he respected—A. J. Gordon, A. B. Simpson, John Dowie, and Frank Sandford—brought him expanded understanding of the Spirit's work.

While visiting Sandford's work in Shiloh, Maine, Parham "recalled hearing speaking in tongues for the first time . . . as he listened to students coming down from the prayer tower after hours of intercession."²⁶ He came to believe that these tongues were given to enable the preaching of the gospel in foreign lands. When he came back to Kansas, he began the Bible school now famous for its turn-of-the-century Holy Spirit revival.

Parham's ministry expanded to include a Bible school in Houston, Texas. William Seymour was a student, and became the leader of the Azusa Street revival. Later Parham and Seymour had a "falling out" over the emotionalism of the Azusa services as well as their interracial nature. But the Pentecostal movement was now growing larger than any one leader could control, even as gifted a leader as Parham. Nevertheless, he made a significant contribution to Pentecostalism by his emphasis on tongues as the initial physical evidence, even though it became obvious in later years that its purpose was not to preach the gospel in foreign tongues.

William J. Seymour: Born to former slaves in Louisiana, Seymour was converted in a Methodist church. Later he joined a holiness group called "The Evening Light Saints."²⁷ In 1905 he attended Parham's Bible school. "Racial attitudes of the day limited Seymour. He was not allowed to sit in a class with white students, but was allowed to listen from the hallway outside the classroom."²⁸ Nevertheless Parham's teaching convinced him that the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism was speaking in tongues.

Later as leader of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Los Angeles, he guided the Azusa Street revival with grace and wisdom. The interracial character of that revival was remarkable for that era, and its influence was international in scope. Before his separation from Parham, he was the West Coast director of the Apostolic Faith Movement.²⁹ He was the first black man of influence in Pentecostalism, but certainly not the last.

E. N. Bell: The Assemblies of God's first general chairman (also the fourth) was a catalyst in the formation of the organization. As editor of *Word and Witness*, he used his publication to issue a call for Pentecostals to convene for the first General Council in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Selected as chairman he gave needed direction to discussions on a wide range of issues.

Unlike some of his peers, Bell was very well educated. He held degrees from Stetson University and Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, plus a bachelor of divinity degree from the University of Chicago.³⁰ His education helped him, not only in his leadership capacities, but in his editorial work as well. His question-and-answer column became a staple in *The Pentecostal Evangel*, where he solidified doctrinal positions, put out "fires" that arose occasionally, and encouraged Spirit-filled living. He helped establish Assemblies of God headquarters in their first home—Findlay, Ohio.³¹

J. Roswell Flower: Flower was selected as the first secretary-treasurer of the new Assemblies of God. He came into Pentecostalism in an Indiana mission, and in 1913 he and his wife, Alice Reynolds Flower, began publishing *The Christian Evangel*. After the Hot Springs meeting, their publication continued on a weekly basis with *Word and Witness* being published monthly. *The Christian Evangel* eventually became *The Pentecostal Evangel* which continues in publication to this day.

Flower not only held the office of secretary-treasurer, but at different times was the Assistant Superintendent, and General Secretary. It is also important to note that he was the first Foreign Missions Secretary-Treasurer, initially distributing funds to 206 missionaries.³² His influence in resolving the challenging doctrinal issues of a fledgling movement was solid and significant.

Early Missionary Endeavors

Initial missionary efforts pre-dated the formation of the General Council. From the beginning Spirit-baptism was seen as empowerment for effective service. Parham emphasized that tongues were given to be utilized on the foreign field. The premillennial understanding of the soon return of the Lord provided additional impetus. So by the time of the Hot Springs gathering, those present generally understood “evangelism to be the supreme purpose of a renewed Pentecostal experience.”³³

Of the five explicit purposes of that first General Council, the third stated:

*We come together for another reason, that we may get a better understanding of the needs of each foreign field and may know how to place our money in such a way that one mission or missionary shall not suffer, while another not any more worthy, lives in luxuries. Also that we may discourage wasting money on those who are running here and there accomplishing nothing, and may concentrate our support on those who mean business for our King.*³⁴

The first missionaries to go to the foreign field after the Topeka revival were Mary Johnson and Ida Andersson, who went to South Africa in 1904.³⁵ Over 200 missionaries were serving overseas by the end of the decade, and McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun identify them in four types.³⁶

- The Ill-Prepared – These missionaries did not engage in language study, because they believed their Spirit-inspired tongues would be used to preach the gospel. They did not raise financial support, because Jesus was coming soon. They did not understand, or prepare to live in, another culture. Many, if not most, failed, and we thus know little about them.
- The Hardy Souls – These resilient gospel warriors learned to adapt to their difficult circumstances. Miracles of divine supply were commonplace, and in spite of hardship, they endured to plant the church in the dark corners of the world.
- The Veteran Missionaries – These were “lifers”, who stayed on their fields of calling most of their lives. Some lived long enough to see the fruit of their labors. Others did not, but their work endured.
- The Educated Missionaries and Bible School Graduates – While not many Pentecostals had formal training, some missionaries developed their spiritual disciplines, ministry skills, and biblical knowledge at Bible institutes.

Missionary zeal was in the DNA of the fellowship. General Superintendent John Welch observed in 1920, “The General Council of the Assemblies of God was never meant to be an institution; it is just a missionary agency.”³⁷ The Missionary Department was established by the General Council in 1919, and two years later adopted a missiological statement espousing the indigenous principle. This action came as a result of a series of articles in the *Pentecostal Evangel* titled, “Paul’s Missionary Methods” by Alice E. Luce.³⁸ She outlined key indigenous church principles that focused on planting and developing self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches.

Having been an Anglican missionary to India prior to her Spirit-baptism and subsequent transfer into the Assemblies of God, she was influenced by the writings of Anglican missiologist Roland Allen who laid the groundwork for the indigenous strategy. Luce went on to found the Latin American Bible Institute in La Puente, California in 1926, and was an influential leader in Hispanic missions and education.³⁹

Missionaries on the field were quick to recognize that the indigenous principle would not work effectively without trained leadership. So they began to invest heavily in the formation of Bible institutes through which they could multiply the number of trained “harvesters.” The challenges were many—students who could not read or write, the absence or shortage of Bibles and Christian texts in native languages, the lack of facilities and teachers. But faithful missionaries persevered, and Bible institutes were established out of which came skilled leaders to pastor indigenous churches.

J. Roswell Flower was the department’s first Missionary Secretary. His primary task was to distribute funds sent to the General Council for various missionaries. Later Flower developed a recommended base budget for each missionary. His capable leadership came at an opportune time for the fellowship.

Noel Perkin became Foreign Missions Secretary in 1927. (Since 1926 he had been filling the unexpired term of William Faux by appointment). In addition, the 1927 Council adopted a Constitution and Bylaws which outlined key missions policies. Four years later Perkin published a missionary manual which included a “mission statement, a brief history of the Pentecostal Movement, and department policies.”⁴⁰ Among other policies, the manual formalized the qualifications for missionary service, the primary purpose of winning souls and establishing churches, and the pledge each missionary was required to sign.

For 32 years Noel Perkin led the foreign missions endeavors of the Assemblies of God, serving with five different General Superintendents. His dedicated work earned him the title of Mr. Missions.⁴¹

Communication Tools

Early Pentecostals used the printed page as their primary source of communication. Radio, television, the internet, and social media would all come later. Simple publications were used to spread the gospel, share testimonies, highlight specific miracles, and teach doctrinal truths. Most significant Pentecostal leaders were associated with some type of a paper. The following is a list of a few of them:

Latter Rain Evangel – edited by William Piper from Chicago’s Stone Church.

Trust – edited by the Duncan sisters, founder of the Elim ministries.

Pentecostal Testimony – edited by William Durham, pastor of the North Avenue Mission, Chicago.

Triumphs of Faith – edited by Carrie Judd Montgomery, a participant in the founding of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, who also operated a Faith Home in Oakland, California.

Apostolic Faith – Several writers used this as the name of their periodicals, including Parham and Seymour.

The Pentecost – J. Roswell Flower, editor, who later passed this periodical on to A. S. Copley.

Word and Witness – E. N. Bell, editor.

The Christian Evangel – J. Roswell Flower and his wife, Alice Reynolds Flower, editors.

Though the 1914 General Council recognized the *Word and Witness* as its official publication, J. Rosell Flower also offered *The Christian Evangel* as a medium of communication. Both continued publication for a time, but eventually only *The Christian Evangel* remained. It was renamed the *Weekly Evangel*, and then in 1919 renamed again the *Pentecostal Evangel*⁴² For almost 30 years Stanley Frodsham was editor of the *Evangel*, also doing much of the editing of other publications as well.

The publishing establishment named the Gospel Publishing House was relocated several times. Initially situated in Findlay, Ohio, it moved to St. Louis in 1915, and then in 1918 to Springfield, Missouri,⁴³ where the new church headquarters was also located. Its output increased from a single periodical to include Sunday school literature, songbooks, books, and other church resources, all written from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective.

The early, formative years were marked by sacrifice, persecution, hardship, and doctrinal confusion. But these difficulties were balanced by a fresh infusion of the Spirit's power, signs and wonders, spontaneity in worship, and a passion to reach lost people. Unlikely people gave surprisingly effective leadership to the revival. But as amazing as this era of Pentecostalism was, it is doubtful that anyone at the first General Council would have predicted that their efforts would result in an international fellowship of millions.

Gibson, Naomi, as told to Merle N. Berwick. "Mother was the First," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 9, 1976. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, p. 6.

² Blumhofer, Edith Waldvogel. *The Assemblies of God: A Popular History*. Second printing. Springfield, MO: Radiant Books, 1985, pp. 10-22.

³ Ibid, p. 18.

⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

⁵ McGee, Gary, Annette Newberry, and Randy Hedlun. *Assemblies of God History, Missions, and Governance, An Independent-Study Textbook*. Fifth edition. Springfield, MO: Global University, 2010, p. 18.

⁶ Blumhofer, p. 20.

⁷ Carlson, G. Raymond. *Our Faith and Fellowship*. Springfield, MO: Radiant Books, 1977, p. 119.

⁸ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 21.

⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁰ Blumhofer, p. 33.

¹¹ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 33.

¹² Blumhofer, p. 36-37.

¹³ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 33.

¹⁴ Blumhofer, p. 37.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁸ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 24.

¹⁹ Blumhofer, p. 42.

²⁰ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 24.

²¹ Ibid, p. 33.

²² Blumhofer, p. 48.

²³ Ibid, p. 51,

²⁴ The resolution read, "Resolved, That this Council considers it a serious disagreement with the Fundamentals for any minister among us to teach contrary to our distinctive testimony that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is regularly accompanied by the initial physical sign of speaking in other tongues, as the Spirit of God gives the utterance, and that we consider it inconsistent and unscriptural for any minister to

hold credentials with us who thus attacks as error our distinctive testimony.” General Council Minutes, 1918, p. 8, as quoted in Blumhofer, AG, p. 242.

²⁵ Cauchi, Tony. “Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929),” *Revival Library*, 2004. Online www.revival-library.org.

²⁶ McGee, Gary. “Tongues, the Bible Evidence: the Revival Legacy of Charles F. Parham.” *Enrichment Journal*, Summer, 1999. Online: www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org

²⁷ “Bishop William J. Seymour,” 312 Azusa Street, 2004. Online: www.azusastreet.org.

²⁸ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 21.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 21.

³⁰ Horn, Kenneth. “Little Known Facts in Assemblies of God History,” *Enrichment Journal*. Fall, 1999. Online: www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org.

³¹ Lewis, Richard. “E. N. Bell—A Voice of Restraint in an Era of Controversy,” *Enrichment Journal*. Fall, 1999. Online: www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org.

³² McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 36.

³³ Blumhofer, Edith L. *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1-To 1941. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989. p. 285.

³⁴ *Word and Witness*, December 20, 1913, p. 1, as quoted in Blumhofer, AG, pp. 201-202.

³⁵ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 25.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Pentecostal Evangel*, 1920, as quoted McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 36.

³⁸ AGWM, “History of Assemblies of God Missions, p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 132.

⁴¹ Blumhofer, Vol. 1, p. 297.

⁴² Blumhofer, p. 59.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 59-60.

Chapter 2 THE DEVELOPING YEARS (1928-1968)

The developing years of the Assemblies of God were marked by two important features: challenge and change. These nearly always accompany the growth of a thriving Christian organization, especially one that wants to walk in step with the Spirit. So second generation Pentecostals gradually replaced the first generation. An anti-education bias was tempered by the founding of Bible institutes to produce an increasingly educated clergy. Evangelicals began accepting Pentecostals on the basis of biblical beliefs mutually held. Ministries outside the fellowship created confusion, and forced clear stands to be taken on doctrinal questions, ministry practices, and personal integrity issues.

Despite these challenges the Assemblies of God continued to grow numerically both at home and overseas, requiring expansion of the organization. New means of reaching people were developed. Support ministries were established that helped propel missions efforts. When strong leadership was needed, the Holy Spirit gave clear direction to the General Council as to who should guide the fellowship during these critical years.

Significant Leaders

In this period two General Superintendents stand out because of their remarkable tenures: Ernest S. Williams, who served 20 years (1929-1949), and Thomas F. Zimmerman, who served 26 years (1959-1985). Their tenures suggest the respect and esteem in which they were held by their ministerial peers.

Ernest S. Williams: Williams was elected as General Superintendent when the fellowship was only 15 years old. While reluctant to leave his pastorate in Philadelphia, he eventually moved to Springfield. But his evident reluctance revealed his pastor's heart and the pastoral nature of his ministry. He was already nationally known through his articles in the *Evangel*, and he had continuing influence as an author. His *Systematic Theology* became a doctrinal text across the fellowship. He was also the speaker of the AG's first radio broadcast, *Sermons in Song* (1946).¹

Williams had been baptized in the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street so his Pentecostal roots were deep. He was a key leader in the establishment of the World Pentecostal Fellowship (1947) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (1948). His strength, stability, and integrity were significant in the increasing solidity of the movement, and during his twenty years of leadership, the Assemblies of God tripled in size.²

Between Williams and Zimmerman: Wesley Steelberg, an early second-generation Pentecostal, was elected in 1949 to succeed Bro. Williams as General Superintendent. However, his time in office was short-lived due to a fatal heart attack in 1952. Assistant Superintendent Gayle Lewis completed Steelberg's term, and in 1953 Ralph Riggs was elected as General Superintendent and served for six years.

Thomas F. Zimmerman: Other than Steelberg’s short tenure, Zimmerman was the first second-generation Pentecostal to be elected General Superintendent (1959). His extended years in office allowed him to leave a significant imprint on the movement. He was known for his leadership and executive skills, and esteemed as an international Christian statesman. His work in linking the Assemblies of God with the National Association of Evangelicals was a major contribution for all Pentecostals. “He was the first Pentecostal to be elected as president of that organization.”³

Two missions leaders also held elected office over a significant span of time: Noel Perkin and J. Philip Hogan. Perkin served 32 years as Missionary Secretary. J. Philip Hogan succeeded Perkin and served for 30 years as Executive Director of Foreign Missions. In 62 of the movement’s first 75 years, missions endeavors were led by these two men.

Noel Perkin: William W. Menzies—missionary, educator, and author—calls Perkins a “farsighted strategist.”⁴ When Perkins first became Missionary Secretary in 1927, his management skills enabled him to create structure, establish cohesion of policy, and build financial integrity regarding missions funds. But his vision was always projecting beyond the present moment. He recognized the need for shifting strategies in light of cultural changes and world crisis. For instance, before World War II ended, he had the foresight to bring missionaries together to strategize about post-war missionary endeavors.⁵ He had a long and productive tenure until he stepped down in 1959.

J. Philip Hogan: Hogan was a second generation Pentecostal elected to office in the same year as Zimmerman. Having served as a missionary in China and Taiwan, he brought practical experience in missions work to the office. Before his election he had been serving in the mission department’s Promotions Office. His energetic and visionary leadership provided new impetus to missions in the fellowship. Organizational changes were made. Leadership decisions were diffused through additional field secretaries who gave oversight to specific regions of the world. Hogan was truly a “mover and shaker”, and did much to bring a missions emphasis down to the grass roots level of the local church.

Organizational Change

To say that the Assemblies of God experienced change during this 40-year developing period would be an understatement. Statistics taken from the General Council’s of 1929 and 1969 emphasize the growth that required changes to be made in processes, systems, policies, and programs.

	<u>1929</u>	<u>1969</u>
Ministers	1,641	11,459
Missionaries	279	969
Churches	1,612	8,570
Membership	91,981	625,660

In 1945 the Council elected four assistant superintendents, rather than just one, to assist in lifting the workload of the General Superintendent.⁶ Over the years, ministry departments were added, such as: the Sunday School Department, the Home Missions and Education Department (later divided into two departments), the Christ Ambassador’s Department (now the Department of Youth Ministries), the Women’s and Men’s

Departments, the Servicemen's Department, etc. These departments and others served to strengthen the work of the local districts and churches.

Seeking to expand its national outreach, the General Council established the Radio Department in 1945. "The first broadcast of the pilot program, *Sermons in Song*, in January 1946 featured General Superintendent Ernest Williams as speaker and Thomas F. Zimmerman as narrator."⁷ This 15-minute broadcast continued until 1950 when it was given a new name—*Revivaltime*—and the format was changed along with the speaker. On Easter Sunday 1950 new General Superintendent Wesley Steelberg stood at the microphone. He continued as speaker until his sudden death in June, 1952. Bartlett Peterson and Wilfred Brown followed as speakers.⁸

C. M. Ward, then pastor of Full Gospel Tabernacle, Bakersfield, California, was appointed as the first full-time speaker for *Revivaltime*. Concurrent with his appointment were the decisions to broadcast live and to begin airing over the ABC radio network. So on December 20, 1953, Ward delivered the first of 1,300 sermons he would preach during his 25-year tenure.⁹ His unique style and powerful anointing won him an expanding radio audience. At its zenith the broadcast prompted 11,000 letters per month from listeners. Each letter was answered and prayer over.¹⁰

At C. M. Ward's inaugural broadcast, a high school boy sat with his family on the front row. Who could have known then that he would become Ward's successor 25 years later? Dan Betzer was that boy.¹¹ Though he followed a legend, Betzer made his own mark over the next 17 years as *Revivaltime* went "across the nation and around the world." In addition, Betzer started a subsidiary broadcast called *Byline*. It was a two-minute take on the news of the day broadcast over several hundred radio stations. Later *Byline* was expanded to television—a totally different program of just one minute released hundreds of times a day, Monday through Friday.¹²

From its beginning until its ending on August 27, 1995, *Revivaltime* purpose had "been consistently evangelism, not denominational promotion. . .yet it is certain that the familiar sound of *Revivaltime* to its weekly audience of 12 million has been instrumental in acquainting multitudes with the Assemblies of God."¹³

Ministerial Training

The early Pentecostal pioneers saw the need for both biblical and ministerial training. However, because many seminaries were marked by severe theological drift, they were viewed with suspicion. Hence many of the early schools, such as Parham's in Topeka, trumpeted the fact that their only textbook was the Bible. But in succeeding years as Pentecostal writings proliferated and doctrinal understanding matured, a wider curriculum was utilized.

Concurrent with the spread of Pentecostalism across the country was the establishment of regional Bible schools. Most were the product of a strong local church with a pastor who had a heart to train students for ministry. Consequently Bible institutes were started in the northeast, southeast, northwest, southwest, and in the heartland of America. In addition two Hispanic schools were developed. Initially these had little connection to the national office, but later came under the oversight of the Education Department. The first successful school sponsored by the General Council was Central Bible Institute founded in 1922 with D. W. Kerr serving as its director.¹⁴

All of these schools had several things in common. They were usually quite small—less than 50 students. Faculty often had to supplement their income with other jobs. Courses on biblical themes and Bible books were the core of the curriculum. Additional courses in the practical aspects of ministry were taught, and students were usually required to be involved in some aspect of ministry outside of class. Students could complete their course of study within three years. The institutes were not accredited.¹⁵

In 1947 Berean School of the Bible was established by the Council with Frank Boyd as its first leader.¹⁶ He produced many of the textbooks for the correspondence courses required for ministerial credentials. In succeeding years many of the institutes, as well as Berean, became colleges, and then universities. In 1999 Berean merged with Global University.¹⁷

Facing an uphill battle were proponents of a General Council sponsored liberal arts institution. One such advocate was Ralph Riggs who argued that Assemblies of God students who were not called to vocational ministry should have a college to attend that would instill Pentecostal values while providing a quality education. Ultimately his view prevailed and in 1953 the Council approved such an institution.¹⁸ Coincidentally Riggs was elected as General Superintendent at the same Council. With Klaude Kendrick as its president, Evangel College opened its doors to students in 1955.¹⁹

Education in national and regional schools was not intended to displace the work of the Spirit. Rather it sharpened the Spirit-given “tools” for increased effectiveness in ministry whether in the pulpit or the marketplace.

Women in Ministry

Pentecostal women proved to be remarkably capable and fruitful in ministry. After all, the first person in modern Pentecostalism to receive the baptism of the Spirit was a woman. The truth of Acts 2:17 could not be denied: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy.” “In the early Pentecostal movement, having the ‘anointing’ was far more important than one’s sex.”²⁰ For most in leadership, including many women, the anointing and the call of God were more essential than ministerial credentials. It was “generally conceded that women could give public utterances, exercise spiritual gifts, pray publicly, teach and engage in missionary work. On the other hand, women were generally discouraged from taking administrative leadership.”²¹

Over time, a progression of steps seemed to broaden the role of women in ministry, but even those steps did not always result in practical ministry for women. Some of the steps take by the General Council in session were:

1914 – Though women were in attendance at the first General Council, they were not allowed voice or vote. Led by E. N. Bell, the Council adopted a statement on the rights and offices of women that allowed for ordination, but only as missionaries and evangelists, roles regarded as prophetic, temporary, or expedient. It denied them pastoral ministry or any administrative office which would give them authority over men.²²

1915 – A category of “advisory members” was created so long as such members were “mature believers.” It supposedly encouraged women attending Councils to register under this category, but still did not allow them to vote.²³

1919 – The Council reiterated that voting privileges were available only to male delegates, but that women could engage in discussions from the floor.²⁴

1920 – The male ministers and delegates voted that women could both speak and vote at General Council.²⁵

1935 – Women received the right to be ordained for ministry, including pastoral ministry.²⁶

This action in 1935 did little to change the roles of women in the church, because male attitudes regarding women in ministry did not change. Nevertheless if the door opened, a broader range of ministry opportunities was now available.

Some of the notable women who had remarkably effective ministries were:

- **Elizabeth V. Baker** – With her four sisters, she founded the Elim Tabernacle and the Rochester Bible Training School in Rochester, New York. After hearing reports of the Azusa Street revival, they came into Pentecost in 1912.²⁷
- **Maria B. Woodworth-Etter** – She was a pioneer of salvation/healing campaigns. Utilizing a tent that seated 8,000, she traveled from coast to coast preaching and praying for the sick. She identified with Pentecostals in 1912.²⁸
- **Minnie T. Draper** – With others she contributed to the founding of Bethel Pentecostal Assembly in Newark, New Jersey, serving as president of Bethel's Board. It established the first Pentecostal mission agency in North America, and founded Bethel Bible Training School.²⁹
- **Lillian Trasher** – She founded Lillian Trasher Memorial Orphanage in Egypt, where she “combined faith, compassion, courage, and good business sense to help thousands of people.”³⁰
- **Alice Reynolds Flower** – With her husband, J. Roswell Flower, she helped to publish the *Christian Evangel* which later became the *Pentecostal Evangel*. “Mother Flower”, as she was called, was a prolific author, writing one hundred poems and sixteen books.³¹
- **Edith Mae (Patterson) Pennington** – A beauty queen and actress, she was converted and became an evangelist. Her meetings drew large crowds, and she used her personal testimony to press the claims of Christ on her audience.

Aimee Semple McPherson was perhaps the best-known woman evangelist of this era. Her evangelistic/healing crusades ministered to tens of thousands of people across the nation. In Los Angeles she erected Angelus Temple which seated 5,300 and was filled three times on Sunday. She was among the first to use radio to preach the gospel, having established KFSG in 1924.³² The Church of the Foursquare Gospel came out of Angelus Temple; it planted multiple branch churches and sent missionaries around the world. It was also the home of Lighthouse of International Foursquare Evangelism (LIFE), a Bible training center.³³ She briefly held credentials with the Assemblies of God (1919-1923), but her interdenominational appeal, her pastoral aspirations, her credentials from other denominations, her marriage/divorce circumstances, and the seeming disapproval of her ministry by the fellowship's leadership prompted her to relinquish her AG credentials. Nevertheless her influence on Pentecostalism was significant and long lasting.

Many other faithful women could be listed. Their call, gifts, persistence, humility, and vision impacted our fellowship and extended the kingdom of God.

Evangelical Identity

Prior to 1940 Pentecostals in general, and the Assemblies of God in particular, functioned in relative isolation from traditional denominations. Once baptized with the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal believers were ostracized by their denominational churches; that door for fellowship was closed. Those who classified themselves as fundamentalists decried speaking in tongues, divine healing, and physical manifestations, as did some churches from the holiness movement. The American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) founded by Carl McIntire, launched virulent attacks on Pentecostals. The Federal Council of Churches (FCC), which purportedly spoke for most Protestants, certainly did not speak for the Pentecostal world.³⁴

In April, 1942, a contingent of “new evangelicals” convened an organizational meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. Their purpose was to take a major step in developing a cooperative evangelical organization distinct from the ACCC and the FCC. Pentecostals were invited, including E. S. William, general superintendent; J. Roswell Flower, general secretary; Noel Perkin, foreign missions secretary; and Ralph Riggs, superintendent of the Southern Missouri District. Other district officials and pastors (including Thomas F. Zimmerman) attended as observers.³⁵ The newly constituted organization was called the National Association of Evangelicals for United Action (NAE).³⁶ “For the first time, Pentecostals had been asked to work with other evangelicals. The Assemblies of God had been welcomed into a broader evangelical fellowship than it had ever known.”³⁷

This did not meet with universal approval. Strong fundamentalists opposed it, but so did some Pentecostals, including many in the Assemblies of God. The matter of joining the NAE was placed before the 1943 General Council. J. Roswell Flower’s strong advocacy of the resolution convinced many, and the Council resolution passed.

Historians McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun note three benefits Pentecostals received by their association with the NAE:

1. “The NAE disagreed with Pentecostal distinctives, but they no longer thought Trinitarian Pentecostals were heretics.
2. “Pentecostals profited through NAE agencies that helped missions efforts, Sunday schools, radio evangelism, and accreditation for Bible schools.
3. “The Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) was established in 1947 because Pentecostals fellowshipped with each other at NAE meetings.”³⁸

This third point addresses the fact that over the years Pentecostals had been isolated from each other. The PFNA was an attempt to reconnect with those who had Pentecostal roots, an effort that was more effective on the leadership level than on the local church level. At about the same time the World Pentecostal Fellowship was organized of which the Assemblies of God became a part.

The Assemblies of God has never veered from its commitment to evangelical doctrine, but it has been emphatic in its continued proclamation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, healing, and other supernatural manifestations.

Latter Rain, Healing Ministries, and Charismatic Renewal

The New Order of the Latter Rain: Turn-of-the-century restorationists, who emphasized the recovery of New Testament gifts for the present time, believed and taught that God still speaks to his church today. They affirmed through tongues and interpretation, prophecy, anointed preaching, the Word of God, and the leading of the Spirit, that God continues his contemporary communication to his church. Revelations, visions, words of knowledge and wisdom, and inner impressions were accepted as God's voice. So when new voices began to declare that an end-time renewal of the gift-ministry had begun, a spiritually hungry audience was ready to believe and receive.

This teaching originated in Canada in 1948 under the ministries of George and Ernest Hawtin, Percy Hunt, and Herrick Holt.³⁹ Their "revelation" was not unlike what had been espoused 40 years before—a new order of spiritual experience was bursting on the scene. It would restore Scriptural order to the church, the gifts of the apostle and prophet would be restored, and denominational structures could not stop it. Whereas the move of the Spirit at the turn of the century was the *early rain*, what would now be experienced was the *latter rain*. Hence the name The New Order of the Latter Rain.

Several core issues were at the heart of the New Order. First, denominations were targeted for criticism because of supposed spiritual declension. In the early years, mainline denominations had been castigated. Now Pentecostal fellowships, including the Assemblies of God, were accused of quenching the Spirit by their layers of organization, lack of spontaneity, and identification with evangelicals who did not hold to Pentecostal views.

Second, a new church order was promulgated which was wholly congregational. This too was an attempt to bypass denominational structures. So the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher (presumably in every local church) should "set apart their own workers, commission their own missionaries, and discipline their own members, at the same time maintaining a cooperative attitude toward other local congregations. They should be accountable only to God."⁴⁰ Functionally the local congregation displaced the denomination. The concept of the five-fold ministry later became prominent in the charismatic renewal.

Third, the process for setting apart individuals for ministry offices often came through tongues and interpretation and prophecy, but it also included the transmission of gifts through the laying on of hands. Personal prophecies by which people were to govern their lives were common. For some the spoken word was placed on equal status with the Scripture. This often resulted in an abuse of power by the leaders, and disillusionment by their followers.

Fourth, the teaching was expounded, but not accepted by all, that a privileged few in the church would become the manifest sons of God. These were the overcomers, who would be rewarded with redemptive bodies. In other words, eternal life actually meant eternal *physical* life.⁴¹ If you were a manifest son of God, you would never die. This teaching was hard to sustain when those who purported to be the manifest sons of God died.

Fifth, deliverance ministries became a point of emphasis. Of course, Pentecostals have always accepted that the Spirit has power to deliver from sin and Satan. But the latter rain emphasis pinpointed all sorts of evils from which believers needed to be delivered.

Some even took the position that the apostles and prophets had the power to provide absolution from sin, as well as bring deliverance.

The official response of the Assemblies of God to the New Order of the Latter Rain came at 1949 General Council in Seattle, Washington. A resolution was passed that “specifically disapproved of three practices: (1) imparting, identifying, bestowing or confirming gifts by the laying on of hands and prophecy; (2) the teaching that the Church was built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets; (3) advocacy of confessing sins and problems to people who then pronounced deliverance or absolution.”⁴²

The latter rain movement eventually died out, but the residue of its teaching became part of the salvation/healing revivals and the charismatic renewal.

Healing Ministries: Pentecostalism had brought with it a renewed emphasis on divine healing. In the early years the ministries of F. F. Bosworth, Marie B. Woodworth-Etter, and Aimee Semple McPherson touched the lives of many thousands; many came to Christ but also received physical healing. Later healing evangelists included: Raymond T. Richey, T. L. Osborn, Oral Roberts, Jack Coe, William Branham, A. A. Allen, Lester F. Sumrall, Velmer Gardner, and Gordon Lindsay. Some of these were Assemblies of God ministers.

However, healing evangelists were plagued by negative issues often of their own making. Criticism surfaced about exaggerated claims of healing, questionable fundraising techniques, tendencies toward self-promotion, sharp disparagement of denominations, and lack of personal integrity. Some evangelists did in fact have moral meltdowns; some however lived and ministered with honor. In spite of the difficulties many were saved and healed.

Healing ministries reached beyond Pentecostal circles and touched people from denominational backgrounds. Their emphasis on the Spirit’s work and the gift-ministry helped lay a foundation for the charismatic renewal where believers from all denominations received the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The Charismatic Renewal: “One of the agencies that came out of the healing revival was the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship, International. Its aim was to promote Pentecostal fellowship across denominational lines. . . offering a setting outside the church in which Pentecostal teaching and worship could flourish.”⁴³ In keeping with what was happening at the FGBMFI meetings, “the winds of the Spirit began blowing in new directions. Some people from other Protestant churches began to pray in tongues. The wall between denominations began to come down.”⁴⁴

Noteworthy people and events in the charismatic movement were:

- Episcopalian Rector Dennis Bennett of Van Nuys, California was filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues. This is sometimes noted as the beginning of the charismatic movement. Subsequently Bennett was exiled to a small parish in Seattle, Washington, where hundreds were Spirit-baptized.⁴⁵
- After Vatican Council 2, the “Duquesne Weekend” took place where two Catholic faculty members and 30 students from Duquesne University received their Spirit-baptism. They had been inspired by David Wilkerson’s book *The Cross and the Switchblade* with its emphasis on supernatural phenomena. This was the beginning of the charismatic renewal among Catholics.⁴⁶

- Assemblies of God minister, David J. DuPlessis, shared the Pentecostal message with the leadership of liberal denominations and the World Council of Churches. This controversial action brought him into conflict with AG officials, and he was asked to relinquish his credentials. However, he contended that classical Pentecostalism was one of three main streams of Christianity: “. . . Roman Catholicism, which emphasizes structure of the church; Protestantism, with its emphasis on doctrine; and Pentecostalism, which accents the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ Later his ministerial credentials were restored.

The charismatic movement raised questions that classical Pentecostals like the Assemblies of God had to answer. How could the Holy Spirit be poured out on those who did not accept evangelical doctrine? What about those who received their “prayer language” but did not believe it was the initial physical evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit? Why didn’t the baptism with the Holy Spirit in denominational members bring about a change in lifestyle that conformed to previously accepted behaviors? Was unity in the Holy Spirit possible without unity of doctrine? Could the AG embrace non-AG Spirit-filled believers without also embracing ecumenism?

In 1972 the Executive Presbytery published a “Charismatic Study Report” in *Advance* (November, 1972) which gave a general clarification of the fellowship’s relationship to this evident move of the Spirit:

The winds of the Spirit are blowing freely outside the normally recognized Pentecostal body. . .

The Assemblies of God does not place approval on that which is manifestly not scriptural in doctrine or conduct. But neither do we categorically condemn everything that does not totally . . . conform to our standards.

. . . It is important to find our way in a sound scriptural path, avoiding the extremes of an ecumenism that compromises scriptural principles and an exclusivism that excludes true Christians.⁴⁸

Though the charismatic renewal raised questions, it also brought a new impulse of the Spirit into many Assemblies of God churches. The newly Spirit-filled who did not stay in their denominational churches often brought with them a renewed vigor in seeking the Spirit’s work. New worship choruses lifted hearts to God, and spontaneity in worship replaced “the way we’ve always done it.” Fellowship with Spirit-filled believers from other churches changed perspectives about them.

Advances in Missions

As the Assemblies of God grew both nationally and internationally, the missionary impulse did not wane. It could be argued that the fellowship’s intentional prioritization of world missions was the cause of the numeric growth. New opportunities demanded fresh strategies. World War II had significant impact on missions endeavors. Missionaries blanketed their districts in itineration. Missions conventions were encouraged. The faith promise concept was introduced. Pentecostal fervor prompted emphasis on the end-time harvest.

Diversifying missions at home: While the Assemblies of God has always been committed to preaching the gospel in the “regions beyond” that international commitment has not resulted in discounting the spiritual need of America. The primary means of meeting that need has been through the ministries of the local church. Just as missionaries sought to build strong indigenous churches overseas, local church pastors also labored to develop churches that were self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. The concept of home missions churches, or district affiliated churches, recognized that some congregations had not yet grown into a three-self church which would afford them General Council, or sovereign, status. But over time many would move from home missions status to General Council status.

From its inception the Home Missions Department promoted church planting. In addition, it began “coordinating more and more specialized ministries among the blind, deaf, Native Americans, prison inmates, and people of other language groups in the U. S. As the Department grew, many missionaries were appointed to work with these groups.”⁴⁹ Most local churches were not prepared or capable of such specialized ministries. Hence the home missionaries took up the task.

The World War II conflict escalated the need for ministry to personnel in military service. In 1944 a Servicemen’s Department was established which gave oversight to military chaplains, coordinated correspondence and mailings to servicemen, and published a paper called *Reveille*, which was edited by Myer Pearlman until his death in 1943.⁵⁰ Outreach to Alaska was also given special emphasis. This last U. S. frontier was pioneered by Charles and Florence Personeus in 1917.⁵¹ After Alaska became a state in 1965, the Alaska District Council was formed and gave oversight to the many works that had been developed. However, appointed home missionaries still pastor some of Alaska’s churches.

In the coming years, the mission of the Home Missions Department would become more sharply focused with a renewed emphasis on reaching what has now become the world’s third largest mission field.⁵²

Developing strategies for world missions: In 1943 Noel Perkin called a three-day conference “to review the conditions on the missions fields and prepare for post-war ministry.”⁵³ Five major goals for the future were outlined: “(1) Appointing field secretaries for all major areas; (2) recruiting 500 new missionaries; (3) providing additional training for missionary candidates and missionaries on furlough; (4) conducting conventions in strategic centers to present various phases of the missionary enterprise to the constituency, and (5) raising a reserve fund of five million dollars for a calculated expansion in the immediate postwar years.”⁵⁴ This was indeed a bold and aggressive posture that aligned faith with the Spirit’s power. These goals gave clear direction for the future.

Under J. Philip Hogan’s leadership, the Global Conquest program (later renamed Good News Crusades) was launched. Its goal was nothing less than world evangelization, and it had three priorities:

1. Literature production
2. Training of national workers
3. Evangelism in the great population centers of the world.

Every church was encouraged to be part of this grand effort. By this time missionary itineration had become the accepted method of fundraising. Missions conventions in the local church were growing in effectiveness. The faith promise plan was developed. All were designed to give local congregations personal ownership of the missions task.

Supporting missions through the local church: Beyond the general all-church approach, specific church departments were developed to assist the missionaries in their endeavors.

- Women’s Missionary Council (WMC) – It was designed for women to be directly involved in intercession, fundraising, child sponsorship, practical provisions for missionaries, and a multitude of other “helps.”
- Missionettes – A girl’s club sponsored by the WMC’s, it emphasized character-building, Scripture memorization, and support of missions.
- Men’s Fellowship Department and Light for the Lost (LFTL) – Money was raised for literature with the expenses of fundraising defrayed by men. Millions of dollars have been raised for literature distribution at home and overseas.
- Royal Rangers (RR) – A boy’s club sponsored by the Men’s Fellowship, it involved men in winning and discipling boys for Christ. Its goal was to strengthen boys mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually.
- Speed the Light (STL) – This was an outgrowth of the Christ’s Ambassador’s Department, and emphasized raising funds for the transportation and equipment needs of missionaries.
- Boys and Girls Missionary Crusade (BGMC) – Children were encouraged to collect coins in wooden banks which would be used for the printing of literature for the missionaries.

During the Global Conquest years, “25 million pieces of literature were being printed in seventy-seven languages every year. This literature production was assisted by funds from Global Conquest and the Boys and Girls Missionary Crusade. Speed the Light bought presses and printing equipment. The new Light for the Lost program gave thousand of dollars toward saturation literature campaigns.”⁵⁵ This was the church at work—from children through adults—touching the world with the good news.

The Council on Evangelism

As the growth of the Assemblies of God began to slow in the 1950’s, and as new leadership took the helm in 1959, it seemed an appropriate time for the movement to do a self-assessment. The Executive Presbytery launched a denominational self-study by appointing a Committee on Advance chaired by the General Superintendent. The committee’s assignment was twofold: to determine the reasons for the slowing of the growth rate, and to develop a five-year plan of advance.⁵⁶

Their intensive study culminated in the Council on Evangelism held in August, 1968, in St. Louis, Missouri. From this meeting came “The Declaration of St. Louis” which rearticulated the three-fold mission of the church that eventually was included in the Constitution’s Statement of Fundamental Truths:

“The priority reason for being in the Assemblies of God as part of the Church is:

- a. To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15, 16).
- b. To be a corporate body in which man may worship God (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- c. To be a channel of God’s purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12).”⁵⁷

The Declaration affirmed that our reason for being could only be fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Council in St. Louis “approved a Five-Year Plan of Advance which included specific goals for the immediate future.”⁵⁸ Those present enthusiastically committed themselves to continued evangelism by all possible means. Thus the foundation was laid for a new surge of growth in coming years.

¹ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 65.

² Ibid, p. 64.

³ Ibid, p. 65.

⁴ Menzies, William W. *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971, p. 274.

⁵ Ibid, p. 132.

⁶ Ibid, p.47.

⁷ Blumhofer, *Popular History*, p. 63.

⁸ Menzies, p. 255.

⁹ Cavaness, Barbara. “The Big Picture from the Long, Long Altar,” *AG Heritage*. Summer, 2003, p. 7-8.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 9.

¹¹ Betzer, Dan. “My Seventeen Years as *Revivaltime* Speaker: Following in the Footsteps of C. M. Ward.” *AG Heritage*. Summer, 2003, p. 14.

¹² Ibid, p. 16.

¹³ Menzies, p. 256.

¹⁴ Blumhofer, Vol. 1, pg. 317.

¹⁵ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 48.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 49.

¹⁸ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 124.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 125.

²⁰ Blumhofer, *Popular History*, p. 137.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Blumhofer, Vol. 1, pp. 207, 364

²³ Ibid, p. 364.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Blumhofer, *Popular History*,, p. 138.

²⁶ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 34.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 22-23.

²⁸ Blumhofer, Vol. 1, p. 35.

²⁹ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 26.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

³¹ Ibid, p. 40.

³² Blumhofer, Edith L. *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody’s Sister*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, p. 226.

³³ Ibid, p. 256.

³⁴ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 49

³⁵ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, pp. 13, 24.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 25.

³⁷ Blomhofer, *Popular History*,, p. 106.

³⁸ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 50.

³⁹ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 59-60.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 61.

⁴² Ibid, p. 65.

⁴³ Blumhofer, *Popular History*, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁴ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 68.

⁴⁵ Bennett’s story is recorded in his book, *Nine O’Clock in the Morning*.

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- ⁴⁶ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 68.
- ⁴⁷ Quoted in Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 100.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted in Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 105.
- ⁴⁹ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 177.
- ⁵⁰ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 141.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, p. 138.
- ⁵² McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 177.
- ⁵³ Ibid, p. 135.
- ⁵⁴ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, pp. 144-145. McGee, Newberry, and Hudlun add a sixth major goal: “Advisory committees of ministries and missionaries in specific regions would be formed.” p. 135.
- ⁵⁵ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 149.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 66.
- ⁵⁷ *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article V, 10. Revised August 4-7, 2009.
- ⁵⁸ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 167.

Chapter 3

THE FRUITFUL YEARS

(1969-Present)

The law of the harvest is unchanging. “A man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:7). After nearly 70 years of Pentecostal blessing, and 55 years as an organized fellowship, the Assemblies of God began to realize a harvest of exponential dimensions, both at home and overseas. While surges of growth ebb and flow, and spiritual battles experience both victories and casualties, the church continues to grow stronger. Now in 2012 Assemblies of God adherents around the world number 64 million (not including China).

These fruitful years are the law of the harvest at work. The powerful seed of the Word was planted by our unheralded forefathers. It was watered by the tearful intercessions of unseen kneeling saints. It was harvested through the committed labor of innumerable pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and a cadre of faithful lay people. And yet, as Loren Triplett put it, “You don’t measure yourself by your success, but against the unfinished task.”¹

Pentecostal Renewal

The Council on Evangelism in 1968 seemed to be a catalyst in reinvigorating the fellowship toward outreach and spiritual renewal. The Council brought clarity to the Assemblies of God statement of mission, and enthusiastically approved a five-year plan of advance. This new sense of purpose and direction made the 70’s and 80’s years of growth.

Concurrently the charismatic movement was continuing full tilt. As previously discussed, it created some consternation in the fellowship, but despite certain excesses it became evident that this fresh outpouring on denominational Christians was Spirit-inspired. Reflecting the growing acceptance of charismatics, the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America made a significant change. Prior to 1994 the PFNA was made up of all-white, classical Pentecostals. But that year in Memphis it became the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America. Classical Pentecostals and charismatics were included, as were blacks and whites. The interracial nature of this new organization has sometimes been called The Memphis Miracle.² But it was equally miraculous that old-line Pentecostals and charismatics would unite for purposes of evangelism, justice, holiness, and spiritual renewal.

In the 90’s two revivals attracted thousands. The first was at The Airport Vineyard Fellowship in Toronto, Canada. Many received positive help at what became known as The Toronto Blessing.³ But the services were marked by unusual physical manifestations. Because of these strange phenomena and the criticism they stirred, the church eventually was removed from the Association of Vineyard Churches.⁴ The second revival began at the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida.⁵ The pastor, John Kilpatrick, sought the counsel of wise leaders so that he could properly guide the revival. In three years, about 2.5 million people attended the services.⁶ Repentance was a major emphasis of the preaching, and many found Christ. This revival was endorsed by Assemblies of God leadership.

Having been born in revival, the Assemblies of God continues to pray that God will revive his church. The *Pentecostal Evangel's* motto is ever true, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord" (Zech. 4:6).

A Stand for Integrity

In 1987 and 1988 the Assemblies of God leaders would be severely tested by the misconduct of two credential holders with high profile television ministries—Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart.

Jim Bakker: Bakker hosted the PTL Club which was viewed widely on Christian television. The programming was a mixture of inspiration, music, teaching, and interviews. Many people were blessed and encouraged by this ministry. Fund-raising had a prominent role, and Bakker made appeals for a variety of causes. But it was his fund-raising for Heritage, U. S. A., a theme park for Christians, that got him into trouble. The Federal Communications Commission investigated him, the courts found him guilty of fraud, and he was sent to prison. In addition, he confessed to sexual misconduct. His ministerial credentials were revoked by the Assemblies of God.

Jimmy Swaggart: Swaggart was an evangelist advocating the "old-time religion." His messages on holiness and separation, and his attacks on worldly values, psychology, the charismatic movement and other perceived ills prompted a broad and positive response among many Pentecostals. His country-style music was received with handclaps and record sales. But he became increasingly critical of Assemblies of God leadership. "He founded a Bible college and seminary in competition with AG schools."⁷ To his credit, he poured millions of dollars into the foreign missions program, helping many missionaries in critical projects.

When he made a television confession of sin, he placed his ministerial credentials in jeopardy. A normal rehabilitation period for sexual misconduct by a minister is two years. Swaggart wanted three months so he could maintain his audience and the income his ministry produced.⁸ Some thought that the General Presbytery would grant an exception based on Swaggart's substantial financial contributions to foreign missions. But the General Presbytery stood firm. Swaggart refused the two-year term of rehabilitation, and subsequently was dismissed from the fellowship.

Both of these scandals were accompanied by extensive national media coverage. But the press conference following the General Presbytery's decision regarding Swaggart was an illustration of high integrity. General Superintendent G. Raymond Carlson was peppered with questions by the media and responded with grace, clarity, and candor. It is worth noting that Carlson himself was well-known in the fellowship for his personal holiness. So it was fitting that he was its spokesman when scandal threatened.

These very public incidences shook the fellowship. It was a wake-up call to be constantly vigilant against any erosion of personal or corporate integrity.

More Organizational Changes

As a growing movement systemic changes were required, not only to maintain present levels of service to churches and ministers, but to branch out into new areas of ministry. Adjustments had to be made to reach a changing culture and a population demographic that was increasingly ethnic. An aging clergy became a concern, and young ministers were not seeking credentials as in previous years. Some years more churches were closed than planted. The Assemblies of God sought to respond to these and other issues by moving in new directions, adjusting to changing circumstances, and discarding methodologies that were no longer fruitful.

General Presbytery additions: The core constituency of the General Presbytery consists of three representatives from each district, including one pastor. Over the years additional presbyters have been added: representatives from World and U.S. Missions, representatives from endorsed postsecondary schools, an evangelist representative, ethnic fellowship representatives, regionally selected female and under-40 ministers, auditors of specified ministries, and honorary general presbyters.⁹ The General Presbytery serves as the primary policy making body for the fellowship.

Executive Presbytery changes: This 20-member body serves as the Board of Directors of the General Council. For many years it was comprised of the four executive officers and eight non-resident (regional) executive presbyters. At later dates the Executive Directors of World and U. S. Missions were added. As the fellowship became increasingly ethnic, four ethnic/language representatives were elected. In 2009 Pastor Bryan Jarrett was elected to represent the under-40 ministers, and missionary Dr. A. Elizabeth Grant became the first woman to serve on the Executive Presbytery.

These last two positions came about after a much broader discussion in the General Presbytery as to whether the Executive Presbytery functioned as an *eldership*, or was a *representative* body. When the General Council in session approved these two new positions, it seemed to be saying that the Executive Presbytery was both a representative body that should include young ministers and women, and an eldership, not viewing elders in terms of their age, but their spiritual maturity.

Executive Leadership Team: This team presently consists of the General Superintendent, the Assistant General Superintendent, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, the Executive Director of World Missions, and the Executive Director of U. S. Missions.

Prior to 1971 five assistant superintendents were in office, but the '71 General Council replaced the five with one. The others became national directors with the exception of the Executive Director of World Missions. Later this position along with the Executive Director of U. S. Missions was placed on the Executive Leadership Team. Other changes came about by normal turnover.

Assemblies of God Financial Solutions: To address the changing and growing needs of ministers, churches, and constituents, Assemblies of God Financial Solutions was formed in 1998. Its purpose was to provide "growth and development of the financial ministries of the Assemblies of God."¹⁰ It offers financial services in investments, planned giving, retirement planning, insurance, church loans, and stewardship consulting. AGFS provides the General Council with a significant funding source.

Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center: Established in 1977 as the Assemblies of God Archives, this archival depository has become a premier site for Pentecostal research. It is the official archives, research center, and museum of the fellowship. In 1999 it was renamed in honor of the J. Roswell Flower family.¹¹ Overseen by the General Secretary's office, its present director is Dr. Darrin Rodgers.

Educational Progress

The educational ministries of the Assemblies of God continue to experience a remarkable evolution: From short-term training schools like Charles Parham's, to Bible institutes, to Bible colleges, to liberal arts colleges, to universities, and to a seminary education. The levels of certification have kept pace. In Bible institutes a certificate was offered. Later came associate of arts and bachelor's degrees. Then the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary began offering master's degrees, and soon after the regional schools also began master's programs. Then AGTS later added doctoral programs, including a Ph. D.

But as the cost of education increased, and the demand for prime facilities grew, so did the challenge of paying for a college education. Scholarship and federal grants helped offset some of that cost, yet many students left school with heavy indebtedness. So a reverse evolution also has taken place. Some students chose to attend local church Master's Commissions, church-based Bible institutes, or district Schools of Ministry—educational opportunities at a much lower tuition level. In addition Global University provided correspondence courses which covered the basic educational requirements for ministerial credentials. This had the advantage of allowing the student to study at home.

The Assemblies of God Theological Seminary: For many years the proposal for a seminary was much debated. Some feared that this type of advanced education could stifle the Spirit's work, and that our fellowship would suffer spiritual declension as so many other denominations had. Others believed that the fellowship's resources should be channeled toward Central Bible College and Evangel College. Still others saw a more highly educated constituency as requiring ministers to keep pace through pursuing graduate education. This view finally won the day and the Assemblies of God Graduate School opened its doors in 1973.¹² It was renamed the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in 1984.¹³

Its first president was the General Superintendent, Thomas F. Zimmerman. Serving as his executive vice president was Cordas C. Burnett, who gave leadership to the seminary on a day to day basis. Since then the seminary has had four presidents—Dr. G. Raymond Carlson, Dr. H. Glynn Hall, Dr. Del Tarr, and presently serving is Dr. Byron D. Klaus.¹⁴

The distinguished AGTS alumni scattered around the world are a testament to the wisdom of establishing a seminary. Particularly impacted by its ministry have been chaplains and missionaries. Military chaplains are required to have a seminary education, and AGTS has been able to meet that need, but with a Pentecostal perspective. Missionaries, especially those involved in educational endeavors overseas, have utilized the seminary for advanced degrees that benefit their missions work.

A Consolidated University: In 2011 the General Council in session approved the consolidation of the three Springfield schools: Central Bible College, Evangel University, and the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. Led by the General Superintendent a consolidation plan was implemented and approval for the consolidation was ultimately granted by the Commission on Higher Education in the spring of 2013. A new president-elect, Dr. Carol Taylor, was also selected in the spring of 2013 by the unanimous vote of the Board members of all three schools. Students of the consolidated school were enrolled for the fall semester of 2013.

A Critical Issue

In every era of the fellowship's history, critical issues have had to be resolved. In this era of fruitful ministry continuing challenges have had to be addressed. In some cases the Executive Presbytery has asked the Commission on Doctrinal Purity (est. 1979) to prepare position papers on issues troubling churches such as positive confession, discipleship and submission, demon possession, and abstinence from alcohol. But some issues are of such a nature that they can only be resolved by the General Council in session. Such an issue was divorce and remarriage.

"In spite of frequent, lively discussions about alternatives, the denomination had consistently opposed the remarriage of a divorced person whose spouse was living. Assemblies of God ministers were forbidden to perform such marriages. . ."¹⁵ And the fellowship had consistently refused to credential any married person with a former living spouse. At the 1973 General Council in Miami the ministers and delegates acted to allow ministers under certain circumstances to unite in marriage a divorced person whose former spouse was still living.¹⁶

It was not until 2001 that the General Council voted to allow the credentialing of divorced persons with a former living spouse, but only for prescribed reasons:

- The divorce must have occurred prior to conversion.
- The divorce was occasioned by the former spouse's marital unfaithfulness.
- The divorce came about because the unbeliever abandoned the believer.¹⁷

These policies continue to be in force at the present time.

Strong Leadership

The clear direction of the Lord has been evident in the wise selection of leadership by the General Council. These fruitful years began with Thomas F. Zimmerman holding the office of the General Superintendent. (See a profile of his tenure in Chapter 2). Since he stepped down in 1985 after 26 years of remarkable leadership, three superintendents have guided the Assemblies of God—G. Raymond Carlson (1985-1993), Thomas E. Trask (1993-2007), and George O. Wood (2007-present).

G. Raymond Carlson: Bro. Carlson's spiritual heritage can be traced to northwestern North Dakota where he found the Lord in 1925. Evangelist Blanche Brittain was used by the Spirit during that revival out of which came multiple churches and more than 100 ministers,¹⁸ including Bro. Carlson. Ordained in 1941, he served in various executive and leadership positions, among which was President of North Central Bible College. In 1969 he was elected as the Assistant General Superintendent. When Bro. Zimmerman stepped down in 1985, Bro. Carlson was elected by his peers to serve as General Superintendent.

He was known for his gentle manner, sterling integrity, and sense of humor. He led through moral authority which served the fellowship well during the years of scandal. His strong writing resulted in fifteen books and numerous articles, most of which dealt with doctrine and Pentecostal distinctives.

Thomas E. Trask: When Bro. Trask was elected at the Minnesota General Council in 1993, he was joined by three new executive officers, as follows:

- Assistant Superintendent – Charles E. Crabtree
- General Secretary – George O. Wood
- General Treasurer – James K. Bridges

Remarkably this team stayed together throughout the 14-year tenure of Superintendent Trask. His tenure was also the third longest after Zimmerman and Williams.

Having served five years as General Treasurer, Bro. Trask was well known for his sound business sense and financial acumen. It is not surprising then that Assemblies of God Financial Services was formed during his years in office. However he was not only a skilled leader, but his commitment to a renewed Pentecostalism became a primary theme of his ministry. Pentecostals needed to do more than “talk the talk,” but experientially it was essential that they “walk the walk.” His preaching, teaching, and writing emphasized this theme.

Bro. Trask was a decisive and visionary leader. He had a passion to help churches, ministers, missionaries, and evangelists fulfill their call. In his view “Headquarters” existed only to serve the fellowship in fulfilling its mission. To that end his was an administration of initiative, and some of the results were: The Enrichment Journal, the pastoral counseling hotline, the Center for Leadership, Vision for Transformation, Convoy of Hope, and much more.

Superintendent Trask served as Chairman of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship. At the turn of the century (2000) the world was invited to Indianapolis for a great Assemblies of God celebration. A global vision statement was read at the celebration, which said in part:

We are a people of the Spirit! We are a people of vision. Birthed in the fire of renewal, still less than one hundred years ago, we have now become a world-wide influence for worship, discipleship, and evangelism in the twenty-first century. . . Who can predict what the Holy Spirit may yet do before the return of the Lord? His vision is that the glory of Christ be revealed among every people and culture. Our church must proclaim Christ to this world in the twenty-first century with first-century fervor.¹⁹

George O. Wood: Dr. Wood succeeded Bro. Trask as General Superintendent in 2007. His background had equipped him for the position and its responsibilities. His dual doctoral degrees—one in ministry, one in law—had served him well during his fourteen years as General Secretary. Prior to that he had been the Assistant Superintendent of the Southern California District, and had pastored one church for 17 years. He was born of missionary parents, and was/is fervent in his global zeal.

The year of his election was also marked by significant turnover in other elected offices, as follows:

- Assistant Superintendent – Alton Garrison
- General Secretary – John Palmer
- Executive Director of Assemblies of God U. S. Missions – Zollie Smith.

Since his election, additional turnover has taken place.

- General Secretary – James Bradford
- General Treasurer – Doug Clay
- Executive Director of World Missions – Greg Mundis.

Shortly after assuming office, Wood outlined five core values that would serve as guideposts in his administration:

1. Passionately proclaim, at home and abroad, by word and deed Jesus as Savior, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Soon Coming King.
2. Strategically invest in the next generation.
3. Vigorously plant new churches.
4. Skillfully resource our fellowship.
5. Fervently pray for God's favor and help as we serve Him with pure hearts and noble purpose.²⁰

A new General Council funding source to implement the core values has been established—The AG Trust.²¹

Some of the initiatives that have been implemented under Dr. Wood's tenure are:

- The Church Multiplication Network²²
- The Healthy Church Network²³
- The Center for Holy Lands Studies²⁴
- Hiring a Chief Operating Officer to oversee headquarters operations
- Changing of name from "Headquarters" to "National Leadership and Resource Center."
- Consolidation of the three Springfield schools—Central Bible College, Evangel College, and the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary.

Dr. Wood is a prolific writer. In addition to authoring numerous books, he has a regular column in the *Pentecostal Evangel*. He is also well known for his use of social media, i.e. Facebook and Twitter. Not only that, but AGTV, iValues, and other media options are readily available on the Assemblies of God website.

Redefining our Purposes

Since the Council on Evangelism in the late '60's, the threefold purpose of the Assemblies of God has been to evangelize the world, worship God, and disciple believers. Historically the fellowship has been cautious about enunciating its role in compassion ministries—feeding and clothing the poor, providing medical and/or dental care, and meeting other social needs. This has not been out a lack of concern for the unfortunate, but because of apprehension that we might lapse into a "social gospel"—meeting the physical needs of hurting people, but not meeting their spiritual needs.

Even without compassion ministries as a stated purpose the Assemblies of God has a long and effective history of ministering to the hurting. Missionaries were often at the cutting edge of such an emphasis. Mark and Huldah Buntain built a hospital in the heart of Calcutta, India. Lillian Trasher established an orphanage in Egypt. A leprosarium was built by Florence Steidel in Liberia. But this was not the main thrust of our missionary endeavors.

In the U. S. many caring ministries were also developed, such as:

- Aged Ministers Association
- Highlands Placement Service, a place where unwed mothers could give birth and have their children adopted into a Christian home
- Teen Challenge – centers for those with drug addictions
- Convoy of Hope – a separate corporation that cooperates with the disaster relief arm of the Benevolence Department
- Maranatha Retirement Village – a retirement and assisted living complex.

These are among the many national compassion ministries that are part and parcel of our fellowship. They do not include all that is done by the local churches to alleviate suffering and minister to the poor.

Recognizing that showing love and compassion is part of what the church is and does, the 2009 General Council added a fourth purpose to its reason for being in the Statement of Fundamental Truths (10): “To be a people who demonstrate God’s love and compassion for all the world (Psalm 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27).”²⁵ It is stated in a slightly different form in the next article of the Fundamental Truths (11): “Meeting human need with ministries of love and compassion.”²⁶ This purpose is fulfilled every day in our churches and through our missions work.

Harvest at Home

Since its inception Assemblies of God U. S. Missions has coordinated specialized ministries in the fellowship. However, the emphasis on reaching America seemed to take a quantum leap in the early ‘90’s based on two important factors: 1) The 1990’s were declared to be the Decade of Harvest for the fellowship, and 2) Charles E. Hackett was elected in 1991 to become the national director of the Division of Home Missions.

The Decade of Harvest: Charles E. Crabtree, pastor of Bethel Church in San Jose, CA., was selected to head the DOH, working directly with the General Superintendent. Crabtree was well-known as an articulate preacher with a missions passion. Specific decadal goals were set for such things as the number of churches to be planted, prayer partners to be enlisted, and souls to be saved. This emphasis brought increased participation in outreach and church planting. On an international level, the DOH prompted aggressive goals, and a zealous pursuit of them.

When Bro. Crabtree was elected as Assistant General Superintendent in 1993, the Decade of Harvest entered a new phase. The goals that had been set were not given primary focus, but their purpose—souls—continued, but through more normal methods. Overseas the church planting thrust continued unabated.

Charles E. Hackett: Long-time pastor at Lafayette, IN., the newly-elected Hackett brought a new perspective to home missions. He said, “God has called us to serve, and we will do our best to fulfill that call.”²⁷ He emphasized that America is the third largest mission field in the world, and U. S. Missions is at work planting churches, evangelizing university campuses, ministering on military bases and in occupational settings, reaching ethnic populations, volunteering skilled labor, and freeing those with life-controlling problems.²⁸

L. Alton Garrison: When Bro. Hackett stepped down in 2005 Alton Garrison was elected to take his place. Previously he had been the Superintendent of the Arkansas District and pastor in North Little Rock, Arkansas. He served only two years as executive director of AGUSM before being elected Assistant General Superintendent. However, he helped to solidify previous gains, propelled U. S. Missions forward with new initiatives, and laid the groundwork for his successor.

Zollie L. Smith, Jr. Elected in 2007, Smith had previously served as an Executive Presbyterian representing the Ethnic Fellowships, and as President of the National Black Fellowship. He served in the New Jersey District as a district officer and pastor. He is a decorated Vietnam War veteran.²⁹ He gives oversight to the seven major ministry areas of AGUSM:

1. Chaplaincy Ministries – Recruits and trains chaplains for specialized ministry in settings such as the military, health care facilities, corrections, law enforcement, emergency services, etc.
2. Chi Alpha Campus Ministries USA – Focuses on reaching and discipling students on university/college campuses.
3. Missionary Church Planters and Developers – Sends missionaries to plant indigenous churches and strengthen existing churches.
4. Intercultural Ministries – Trains and equips indigenous leaders to reach those with diverse languages, cultures, and ethnicity.
5. Teen Challenge International USA – Ministers to with life-controlling problems such as substance abuse.
6. U.S. Mission America Placement Service (MAPS) – Coordinates volunteers to assist churches and ministry institutions with construction and evangelism projects.
7. Youth Alive – Works cross-denominationally to connect youth ministry to schools.³⁰

These seven major areas of ministry in AGUSM in 2012 involve more than 1,000 missionaries, candidates and spouses, and more than 550 endorsed chaplains, with over 4,000 other related field personnel.³¹

Despite leadership changes over the years, the focus of AGUSM remains the same. “AGUSM still reaches out to lost souls of America by providing real, relevant, and relational ministry in unique ways.”³²

Great Commission Motivation

Early Pentecostalism was the spark that ignited a missionary fire in the hearts of Spirit-filled believers. More than 100 years since the Topeka outpouring, that fire still burns brightly. And it has spread. Pentecostal fervor for reaching the lost is not an American phenomenon. Countries pioneered by Assemblies of God missionaries are now sending their own missionaries to evangelize the lost and plant the church of Jesus Christ. Gifted and capable national leaders now set the pace in their own countries, and visionary educators are taking over the role of training a new generation of God-called ministers.

The indigenous principle adopted by our early missions leaders is now producing exponential growth in many parts of the world.

In these fruitful year (1969-present) Assemblies of God World Missions has had a succession of dynamic leaders to chart the course for an army of missionaries who serve around the world. In Chapter Two, J. Philip Hogan is profiled. He provided energetic leadership for 30 years (1959-1989).

Loren Triplett: Succeeding Hogan was veteran missionary Loren Triplett. He had served for many years in Nicaragua and then became the Latin American Regional Director. Upon his election as Executive Director in 1989, he directed the multifaceted missions ministries that had one overriding purpose—to fulfill the Great Commission.

To raise the missions awareness and motivate people to give and go, regional Fly-ins were developed. Much like a missions convention, the Fly-ins invited pastors, district leaders, missions committees, and lay people to participate. Speakers, media communication, and access to missionaries were used to demonstrate how a church could have a missions convention of its own. In addition, musicals were created for use by local church choirs during their conventions. Heightened use of media became an increasing focus.

L. John Bueno: When Bro. Triplett resigned in 1997, L. John Bueno was elected to serve. He had been a missionary in El Salvador until becoming the Latin American Regional Director. He founded Latin American Child Care, and pastored a church of 25,000 in El Salvador. He served as Executive Director of AGWM until 2011, and his fourteen years were marked by measurable advances around the world.

He helped redefine the main purpose of AGWM:

“1. Reaching: The widest possible evangelism of the spiritually lost through every available method.

“2. Planting: The establishment of indigenous churches after the New Testament pattern.

“3. Training: The training of national believers to proclaim the gospel to their own people and to other nations.

“4. Touching: The showing of compassion for suffering peoples in a manner representing the love of Jesus Christ.”³³

Greg Mundis: Elected in 2011, Dr. Mundis’ missionary service was in a different part of the world from that of Triplett and Bueno—Europe. For 17 years he served as missionary in Austria. He became the Europe Regional Director in 1998. He is an articulate communicator of the mission of God—reaching the world for Christ.

From 32 missionaries in 1914 to 2,740 AG missionaries and associates in 217 countries and territories in 2012,³⁴ the Great Commission is still the church’s primary motivator. The Holy Spirit provides the necessary empowerment to accomplish the task. And He uses all kinds of people to proclaim the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹ As quoted by Greg Mundis in “. . . So all can hear,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 5, 2012, p. 5. Loren Triplett served as Executive Director of Assemblies of God World Missions from 1989-1997.

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- ² McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 96.
- ³ Ibid, p. 97.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 86.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article IX, Section 3. Revised August 4-7, 2009.
- ¹⁰ www.agfinancial.org.
- ¹¹ www.ifphc.org.
- ¹² Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 128.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ www.agts.edu/about/history.html
- ¹⁵ Blumhofer, Vol. 2, p. 181.
- ¹⁶ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 81.
- ¹⁷ See *Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article VII, Section 2, k; Article IX, B, Section 5, c, (1); Article IX, B, Section 5, e.
- ¹⁸ Menzies, William W., *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God.* Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971, p. 159.
- ¹⁹ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 92.
- ²⁰ <http://ag.org/top/About/mission.cfm>.
- ²¹ www.agtrust.org.
- ²² www.churchmultiplication.net
- ²³ www.healthychurch.org
- ²⁴ <http://holylandsstudies.ag.org/>
- ²⁵ *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article V. Revised August 4-7, 2009.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 177.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ <http://ag.org/top/About/Leadership/index.cfm#agusm>
- ³⁰ <http://usmissions.ag.org/>
- ³¹ <http://ag.org/top/About/Leadership/index.cfm#agusm>
- ³² McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 177.
- ³³ Ibid, pp. 182-183.
- ³⁴ Statistics as of March, 2012.

Chapter 4

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

GOVERNANCE

In 2014 the Assemblies of God celebrates its 100th anniversary as a fellowship. The 300+ delegates attending the first General Council in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1914 could not have predicted that the movement they were forming would someday number more than 3 million U. S. adherents.

How has it been possible for the Assemblies of God to maintain its spiritual vitality and effectiveness for nearly a century? Any church that adheres to sound biblical doctrine, acknowledges its total dependence on the Holy Spirit, and aggressively advances the mission of God—that none perish—should be able to increase its impact on the world despite the passing of years.

However, beyond these spiritual essentials is a key factor often overlooked—organization. Our founders were wise enough to establish systems by which the newly formed fellowship was to function. The governing instruments of the Articles of Incorporation, the Constitution, and the Bylaws provided doctrinal definition, guidelines for ministerial function, a framework for local churches and districts, and directives for the national headquarters. These laid a foundation for such things as unity, order, accountability, common values, fellowship, and continuity. They described processes for decision-making, problem-solving, and day-to-day operations. The governing documents have changed over the years, especially the Bylaws, but the fundamentals remain.

Forms of Church Polity

The term *polity* means the organizational or governmental structure of a local church or fellowship of churches. To put it another way, it is a form of church government adopted by an ecclesiastical body.¹ Several forms of church government exist.

- Episcopal (from *episkopos* meaning *overseer*) – This is a hierarchical form of governance in which the primary authority is vested in the bishop.
- Presbyterian (from *presbuteros* meaning *elder*) – Primary authority in this form of governance is given to the session, a group of elders chosen by the congregation.
- Congregational – Here authority rests with the congregation except when decisions have been delegated to the pastor(s) or the church board. This division of responsibilities is usually spelled out in the Constitution and Bylaws.

Many arguments have been marshaled to prove that a particular form of polity is more biblical than the others. Each form certainly has its benefits and drawbacks. However, the New Testament does not seem to delineate a specific form of governance. That allows a local church to adapt its type of governance to its size, history, culture, and community. The Assemblies of God has generally adopted the congregational model with considerable flexibility for adaptation as long as the church's governing documents adequately address the need for safeguards, accountability, and amenability.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the General Council and/or the local church are essential to the effective functioning of the organization. The “constitution sets forth the official identity of the organization. It also defines the basic qualifications and conditions under which the organization operates. The bylaws contain the rules and procedures for the daily operation of the organization. This includes administrative details about offices, departments, and procedures required to accomplish the work of the organization. A simple way to compare these documents is to think of the constitution as the official description of the Assemblies of God and the bylaws as the rules and procedures of everyday operation.”² Some local churches have found benefit in combining the Constitution and Bylaws into one document—the Bylaws.

Doctrinal Foundations

Agreement on doctrinal issues is critical for any church organization. Our forefathers set forth the Statement of Fundamental Truths “as a basis for fellowship . . . i.e. that we all speak the same thing . . .”³ Here is a condensed version of the Sixteen Fundamental Truths as outlined on the Assemblies of God official website (www.ag.org).

1. WE BELIEVE. . .The Scriptures are inspired by God and declare His design and plan for mankind.
2. WE BELIEVE. . .There is only One True God—revealed in three persons. . . .Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (commonly known as the Trinity).
3. WE BELIEVE. . .In the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. As God’s son Jesus was both human and divine.
4. WE BELIEVE. . .Though originally good, man willingly fell to sin—ushering evil and death, both physical and spiritual, into the world.
5. WE BELIEVE. . .Every person can have restored fellowship with God through ‘salvation’ (trusting Christ, through faith and repentance, to be our personal Savior).
6. WE BELIEVE. . .And practice two ordinances—(1) Water Baptism by immersion after repenting of one’s sins and receiving Christ’s gift of salvation, and (2) Holy Communion (the Lord’s Supper) as symbolic remembrance of Christ’s suffering and death for our salvation.
7. WE BELIEVE. . .The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special experience following salvation that empowers believers for witnessing and effective service, just as it did in New Testament times.
8. WE BELIEVE. . .The initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is ‘Speaking in Tongues,’ as experienced on the Day of Pentecost and referenced throughout Acts and the Epistles.
9. WE BELIEVE. . .Sanctification occurs at salvation and is not only a declaration that a believer is holy, but also a progressive lifelong process of separating from evil as believers continually draw closer to God and become more Christlike.
10. WE BELIEVE. . . The church has a mission to seek and save all who are lost in sin. We believe ‘the Church’ is the Body of Christ and consists of the people who, throughout time, have accepted God’s offer of redemption (regardless of religious denomination) through the sacrificial death of His son Jesus Christ.
11. WE BELIEVE. . . a divinely called and scripturally ordained leadership ministry serves the church. The Bible teaches that each of us under leadership must commit ourselves to reach others for Christ, to worship Him with other believers, to build up or edify the body of believers--the Church and to meet human need with ministries of love and compassion.

12. WE BELIEVE. . . Divine healing of the sick is a privilege for Christians today and is provided for in Christ's atonement (his sacrificial death on the cross for our sins).
13. WE BELIEVE. . . In the blessed hope—when Jesus raptures His church prior to His return to earth (the second coming). At this future moment in time all believers who have died will rise from their graves and will meet the Lord in the air, and Christians who are alive will be caught up with them, to be with the Lord forever.
14. WE BELIEVE. . . In the millennial reign of Christ when Jesus returns with His saints at His second coming and begins His benevolent rule over the earth for 1,000 years. This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel and the establishment of universal peace.
15. WE BELIEVE. . . A final judgment will take place for those who have rejected Christ. They will be judged for their sin and consigned to eternal punishment in a punishing lake of fire.
16. WE BELIEVE. . . And look forward to the perfect new heavens and new earth that Christ is preparing for all people, of all time, who have accepted Him. We will live and dwell with Him there forever following His millennial reign on Earth. 'And so shall we forever be with the Lord!'

All of these doctrinal tenets are backed solidly by Scripture,⁴ and Assemblies of God churches and ministers are mandated not only to believe them, but to preach and teach them.

A Voluntary Cooperative Fellowship

Article II of the Constitution titled *Nature* says, "The General Council of the Assemblies of God is a cooperative fellowship based upon mutual agreements voluntarily entered into by its membership, and shall be known as a fellowship of churches and credentialed ministers."⁵ This not only defines the nature of our organization—voluntary cooperative fellowship—but also what constitutes its membership—churches and credentialed ministers.

Member Churches: The fellowship includes four different types of churches:

1. *General Council Affiliated Assemblies:* These churches must meet specific requirements that validate the principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. These requirements include meeting the minimum number of voting members—20 persons, and having leaders who are spiritually mature and able to serve with the pastor on the church board. An acceptable set of governing documents/bylaws is also required.⁶ Those churches affiliated with the General Council "are deemed to be sovereign, autonomous, self-governing and self-determining bodies . . ."⁷ Nevertheless they are amenable to the General Council and district council in matters of doctrine and conduct.
2. *District Council Affiliated Assemblies:* Assemblies who do not meet the minimum General Council requirements may be affiliated with their district council, and work under its supervision.⁸
3. *Parent Affiliated Churches:* In keeping with district council guidelines, these assemblies function under the oversight of a parenting church.⁹
4. *Cooperative Assemblies:* Churches that subscribe to the Statement of Fundamental Truths and the Assemblies of God Constitution can enter into a cooperative status on a temporary four-year basis prior to official affiliation. This cooperative status can be renewed at the conclusion of the four year period.¹⁰

Member Ministers: Ministerial credentials are granted at four different levels:

1. *Local Church Credential:* As its name implies, this non-transferable credential is issued by the local church to candidates aspiring to become certified ministers within a two-year period. That time period can be extended if the person has active and ongoing ministry in a prison, hospital, or institution.¹¹
2. *Certified Minister:* In many cases this is the entry level credential granted to those who give evidence of a divine call and are actively engaged in some form of ministry and proclamation of the gospel.¹²
3. *Licensed Minister:* "Qualifications for license shall include clear evidence of a divine call, character and preparation suitable for that calling, practical ministry experience, and an evident purpose to devote one's life in service to the proclamation of the gospel."¹³
4. *Ordained Minister:* After two consecutive years of active ministry as a licensed minister, a person may be eligible for ordination. Applicants must be 23 years of age or older, and meet all the necessary requirements.¹⁴

All these credentials are granted without regard to gender, race, disability or national origin. Credential holders "are authorized to perform the ordinances and ceremonies (sacerdotal functions) of the church."¹⁵

So the Assemblies of God is made up of churches and ministers. Neither a church nor a minister is forced to join this fellowship. Their alignment with the Assemblies of God is voluntary. For churches that means they will cooperate through amenability to the General Council and district council in matters of doctrine and conduct.¹⁶ For ministers it means they will not only cooperate but actively participate in the fellowship, complying with the policies and provisions for the privilege of holding a ministerial credential.¹⁷ Together the churches and ministers form a voluntary cooperative fellowship.

District Councils and Fellowships

Types of Districts: Presently two types of district councils function in the Assemblies of God.

1. *Geographical districts:* State boundary lines are utilized in defining the geographical borders of many of our districts. Some states are large enough to support more than one district. For instance the state of Texas has three districts. In other cases several states, or parts of states, combine to form a district. The Northwest Ministry Network (district) is an example of this, covering Washington and Northern Idaho. All of the United States is made up of geographical districts.
2. *Ethnic/Language districts:* Ethnic/language churches are not limited by geography in the formation of a district, but may develop a district beyond state lines. Their fellowship and function is based on their specific ethnic/language character, not geographical boundaries.

Forming a District: Both types of district councils must follow the same basic guidelines when establishing a district. These guidelines include having a minimum of 40 assemblies, being of sufficient size and maturity to provide leadership and ministry, having growth potential, and discerning the effect forming another district has on other districts.

Prior to the formation of a new district, two interim steps may be taken--one for geographical districts, and one for ethnic/language districts.

- For potential geographical districts, conference status may be granted. “In isolated geographical areas where there is development potential [this status] would provide assistance of an existing district until the new district is capable of independent operation.”¹⁸
- For potential ethnic/language districts, authorization can be given by the Executive Presbytery for the formation of a fellowship of churches. “The fellowship shall exist for the purpose of exchanging information, facilitating evangelism, and establishing churches. Until such time as it is qualified to form a district, it shall be part of the geographic or language district.”¹⁹ By 2012 the Assemblies of God had 21 ethnic fellowships.²⁰

The Role of the District: The Constitution’s provision for a district’s function and authority revolves around two words: *ecclesial* and *sacerdotal*.²¹ The former is taken from the Greek word, *ecclesia*, meaning *assembly*. So the district has as one of its primary concerns the welfare of and help to the local church. The term *sacerdotal* relates to the minister’s functions in the church. So the minister is a primary focus of the district as well.

The Bylaws use different terminology to describe the role of the district, but all of the terms relate to the local church and its minister. Terms such as *network*, *resources*, *relationships*, and *training* are used. Oversight of district affiliated churches is a key ingredient, and the district’s bylaws outline that relationship. The district is also a recommending body as it relates to ministerial credentials and discipline.

Our Pentecostal history teaches us the critical importance of the local church, and the God-call, Spirit-anointed minister. Before the Assemblies of God was founded, these two elements were present and functioning. Organizational structures were created to facilitate and enhance the development of the local church, and to recognize those men and women of God whose doctrine, character, and fruitfulness were clearly evident. This could not be done exclusively from a national level, but required delegation to the districts and their leadership. In turn many districts divided into sections led by a presbyter. All of this was developed out of a desire to strengthen ministers and local assemblies.

Local Assemblies

Church planting is one of the priorities of the Assemblies of God. The General Superintendent as of this writing, Dr. George O. Wood, has advanced the planting of new churches as one of our core values. Usually these new assemblies begin as district affiliated or parent affiliated churches, the districts giving approval and oversight to their launching.

When the church has grown to the point of having at least 20 active voting members, has manifested stability and maturity, and has sufficient number of qualified persons available for the offices prescribed in the church’s constitution and bylaws, it may qualify for affiliation as a General Council affiliated church. That “next step” is processed through the district presbytery via an application for affiliation. Upon approval it is forwarded to the general secretary of the General Council, who may then send an official Certificate of Affiliation to the local church.²²

Each assembly has the privilege of participating in the Annual Church Ministries Report and the Fellowship Partners Offering.²³ In addition the Bylaws caution churches against opening their pulpits to unknown or questionable persons or ministries until spiritual integrity and reliability have been established.²⁴ Should a church suffer from division, guidelines are given for how a district should seek to counsel, mediate, and preserve relationship with any meritorious group.²⁵

The Credentialed Minister

Basic Qualifications: Four levels of ministerial credentials were cited earlier in this chapter. At every level, the following basic qualifications must be met:

- Salvation.
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- Evidence of call.
- Christian character.
- Doctrinal understanding of and agreement with the Statement of Fundamental Truths.
- A working knowledge of Assemblies of God polity.
- Voluntary cooperation and commitment to the Fellowship.²⁶

Ministerial applicants must pass a standard exam which demonstrates their knowledge of the Bible, doctrine, and ministerial practices. In addition they must be interviewed by the district credentials committee which shall make a recommendation to the General Council Credentials Committee which gives final approval.

Basic Education Requirements: The applicant need not have earned a specific academic diploma or degree. But he/she should have completed training in a postsecondary school, or completed prescribed courses through Global University (Berean), or be recommended by a district credentials committee based on years of proven and fruitful ministry and self-study.²⁷

Marriage Status: The fellowship disapproves “of any married persons holding ministerial credentials with the Assemblies of God if either marriage partner has a former spouse living, unless the divorce occurred prior to his or her conversion or for the scriptural causes of a former spouse’s marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9), or the abandonment of the believer by the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:10-15) . . .”²⁸ Ecclesiastical annulments may be granted where there is “clear and satisfactory evidence of deception, fraud, or other conditions which have a profound impact preventing the creation of a valid marriage union, unknown at the time of marriage by the applicant.”²⁹

Ministers from Other Organizations: Provision is made for ministers from other reputable church bodies who desire to affiliate with the Assemblies of God. The Bylaws list 10 steps for such ministers to take in order to be granted credentials. With rare exceptions, they are required to relinquish their ministerial credentials from the organization with which they had previously been affiliated.³⁰

Ministers ordained with a member group of the Assemblies of God World Fellowship may transfer their ordination to the General Council, if the following criteria are met:

- A letter of recommendation must be received from the executive committee of the national church or an equivalent letter of recommendation.
- The transferee must complete a course on history and polity in the U.S. church.
- A ministerial application must be completed.³¹

Transfers, Renewals, and Reinstatements: “When a member minister takes up residence in another district, a certificate of transfer shall be issued within 60 days by the district of which he or she is a member, unless there are charges pending against the minister. The certificate of transfer shall be accepted by the district into which the minister moves.”³² Ministers from geographical districts may transfer to ethnic/language districts, and vice versa. Nine exceptions to this transfer policy are outlined in the Bylaws.³³

Ministerial credentials are valid only until December 31 of each year and must be renewed annually by completing an annual renewal form provided by the General Council. Key dates to remember are:

- December 31 – Date by which the annual renewal form is to be postmarked, and after which the renewal is considered delinquent.
- January 15 – Delinquent renewals are provided a grace period until this date in which they can return their renewal form accompanied by a late fee.
- After January 15 – The minister’s credential is recorded as lapsed. He/she must make application for reinstatement and pay a nonrefundable fee.³⁴

If a minister is removed from the ministerial list for any cause, except failure to renew and dismissal, he/she will not be eligible for reinstatement until at least six months have elapsed from the time his name was stricken from the list. The reinstatement application must be made in the district where the minister resides accompanied by a fee. The district of residence shall seek a letter of clearance from the district that processed the termination. It may then add its own endorsement and forward the application and letter of clearance to the General Council Credentials Committee for its action.³⁵

Ministers may choose to terminate their credentials by failing to renew or by resigning. Districts may terminate a minister’s credentials if he/she is inactive for two years. They may also choose to *not renew* a minister’s credentials, a termination that falls short of disciplinary action.³⁶

Ministerial Support: Each minister is required to contribute to the National Leadership and Resource Center. This may be given as part of their tithe, or as an offering. Ordained, licensed, and certified ministers are to contribute the amounts designated in the Bylaws, Article VII, Section 10, f. Local church credential holders contribute to their local church. Each district also has the prerogative of establishing ministerial contribution requirements for their districts. Ministerial credentials will not be renewed if these national and district financial commitments have not been met.

Discipline of Credentialed Ministers

Article X of the Bylaws provides a detailed process by which ministers may be disciplined. Such discipline is not intended as punitive, but redemptive; the restoration of the minister is in view. However, spiritual discipline also protects churches from those whose misconduct disqualifies them for active ministry. The districts—those to whom the minister is most closely accountable—are key to the discipline process.

Causes of Disciplinary Action: The Bylaws list 14 issues that may give cause for disciplinary action. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but represents the type of conduct that is not approved:

1. Moral failure involving sexual misconduct.
2. Moral failure involving pornography.
3. Any moral or ethical failure other than sexual misconduct.
4. General inefficiency in ministry.
5. A failure to represent our Pentecostal testimony correctly.
6. A contentious or noncooperative spirit.
7. An assumption of dictatorial authority over an assembly.
8. An arbitrary rejection of district counsel.
9. A declared open change in doctrinal views.
10. Immoral, unethical, or illegal practices related to personal, church, or ministry finances.
11. A marriage in violation of our stand on marriage and divorce. (See Article IX, B, Section 5, paragraph d and e.)
12. Violations of ministerial courtesy. (See Bylaws, Article IX, B, Section 8.)
13. Ministry without prior approval in a non-Assemblies of God church. (See Bylaws, Article IX, B, Section 9.)
14. An improper attitude toward those dismissed from the Fellowship. (See Bylaws, Article IX, B, Section 10.)³⁷

Stages in the Disciplinary Process: McGee, Hedlun, and Newberry note that there are four distinct stages in the disciplinary process.³⁸

1. An accusation or complaint against a minister is received by the district, or in some cases the district initiates the complaint.
2. The district in which the alleged offense took place investigates the claim by interviewing all relevant parties, and gathering information that may or may not validate the accusation. If a minister confesses to misconduct, then the accusation is affirmed. If the minister does not confess, then the district must make an assessment of all the information.
3. If the investigation determines that charges should be filed, then a hearing with the district credentials committee is provided. The committee must determine the guilt or innocence of the accused minister. If the minister has confessed and/or is found guilty, the committee then decides whether the minister should be granted rehabilitation or be dismissed. Their decision is forwarded to the General Council Credentials Committee for final decision.
4. A minister has the right to appeal the final decision. In fact two avenues of appeal are made available, first to the General Council Credentials Committee, and then to the General Presbytery.

The purpose of rehabilitation is to restore the minister to God, spouse, and family. Achieving these goals may also make it possible for ministry to be restored. The rehabilitation terms and conditions such as time frame, extent of ministry, levels of supervision, reporting, etc., is recommended by the district credentials committee to the General Council Credentials Committee for final approval. Upon satisfactory completion of the rehabilitation and recommendation by the district, the minister will be restored to good standing.

Disapproved Doctrines and Practices

Our Pentecostal history teaches us that we must be constantly vigilant against false teaching and questionable practices that can dilute our faith. Some of these may take the form of temporary fads, while others may be more deeply rooted. Over the years our fellowship has identified several doctrinal issues and practices which are not only discouraged, but disapproved. A full list will not be included here, but it includes such issues as unconditional security, legalism, membership in secret orders, abuses of stewardship, and eschatological errors.³⁹

To assist the General Council in maintaining doctrinal consistency, the Executive Presbytery established a Commission on Doctrinal Purity. The Commission's purpose is to give "careful attention to preventing deviations from the Statement of Fundamental Truths and proliferation of unscriptural teachings."⁴⁰

Decision-making and Leadership

The General Council: The highest decision-making body in the Assemblies of God is the General Council in session. These meetings convene every two years. Those eligible to vote are all ordained and licensed ministers, and one delegate from each General Council affiliated church, who is present and registered at the Council.

The General Presbytery: The second highest decision-making body is the General Presbytery. The core constituency of the General Presbytery consists of three representatives from each district, including one pastor. Over the years additional presbyters have been added: representatives from World and U.S. Missions, representatives from endorsed postsecondary schools, an evangelist representative, ethnic fellowship representatives, auditors of specified ministries, and honorary general presbyters. One ordained minister under the age of 40 and one female ordained minister may also represent the various geographical regions, plus language and ethnic areas and fellowship, as prescribed by the Bylaws. The General Presbytery serves as the primary policy-making body of the fellowship.⁴¹ It is amenable to the General Council.

The Executive Presbytery: This 20-person body consists of the six executive officers and 14 other persons elected by the General Council. They act as the Board of Directors of the General Council, and are amenable to the General Presbytery and the General Council.

The Executive Leadership Team: The corporate officers are the General Superintendent, the Assistant General Superintendent, the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer. Also in the leadership team are the Executive Director of World Missions and the Executive Director of U. S. Missions. The Executive Leadership Team is amenable to the Executive Presbytery of which they are a part. The names of current members of the Executive Leadership Team can be accessed on www.ag.org.

Organizational and Operations Manuals: The continued growth of divisions, departments, commissions, and committees at the National Leadership and Resource Center required the development of two essential manuals: the Organizational Manual and the Operations Manual. They outline the structure, purpose, and function of the various ministries at headquarters. They address the multitude of official policies necessary to make the administrative day-to-day processes run smoothly. The Organizational Manual is approved by the General Presbytery and the Operations Manual is approved by the Executive Presbytery.

This chapter has provided you with an overview of the basic governance principles in our fellowship. It has not touched on every aspect of the General Council Constitution and Bylaws, but has sought to focus on the essential issues. Many of the footnotes point to the relevant Bylaw provisions under discussion which can be referenced for more detail.

¹ Akin, David, James Leo Garrett, Jr., Robert L. Reymond, James R. White, Paul F. M. Zahl. *Perspectives on Church Government*. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, eds. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004, p. 2.

² McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 193.

³ *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article V. Revised August 1-5, 2011.

⁴ To read the Statement of Fundamental Truths in its entirety with accompanying Scripture references, see *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article V. Revised August 1-5, 2011.

⁵ *Ibid*, Article II.

⁶ *Constitution of The General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article XI, Section 1, a. Revised August 1-5, 2011.

⁷ *Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article VI, Section 4, a. Revised August 1-5, 2011.

⁸ *Constitution of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*. Article XI, Section 2. Revised August 1-5, 2011. The relationship between District Affiliated Churches and their district is generally outlined in the Constitution and Bylaws of the respective districts.

⁹ *Ibid*, Article XI, Section 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Article XI, Section 4.

¹¹ *Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article VII, Section 1. Revised August 1-5, 2011.

¹² *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 3, c.

¹³ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 3, d.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 3, e.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Article VI, Section 4, a.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 2, g.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Article V, Section 1, a.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Article V, Section 6, a.

²⁰ <http://ethnicrelations.ag.org/districts.cfm>

²¹ *Constitution of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article X, Section 2.

²² *Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article VI, Section 1.

²³ *Ibid*, Article VI, Section 2.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Article VI, Section 3.

²⁵ *Ibid*, Article VI, Section 4, c.

²⁶ *Ibid*, Article, VII, Section 2.

²⁷ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 214.

²⁸ *Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, Article VII, Section 2, j.

²⁹ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 2, k.

³⁰ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 2, m.

³¹ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 9, b.

³² *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 9, a.

³³ *Ibid*, Article VII, Section 9, a, d.

³⁴ Ibid, Article VII, Section 10.

³⁵ Ibid, Article VII, Section 10, e.

³⁶ Ibid, Article VII, Section 11, a, b.

³⁷ Ibid, Article X, Section 3.

³⁸ McGee, Newberry, and Hedlun, p. 217.

³⁹ For a full list of disapproved doctrines and practices, see *Bylaws*, Article IX, B.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Article IX, A, a.

⁴¹ Ibid, Article III, Section 9, b.

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