

The Wednesday and Thursday evening services of the 73rd General Assembly in Orlando will be broadcast live on the DayStar Television network. Both broadcasts will be televised at 8:00 pm.

The Wednesday service will feature the ministry of Israel Houghton, a well-known contemporary Christian artist who will lead in music ministry. The message will be delivered by Rev. Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse who also leads the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The Thursday evening service will feature a message by Rev. Tim Hill, First Assistant General Overseer of the Church of God.

For additional information about our General Assembly please go to <http://www.churchofgod.org/assembly10/#>

About the General Assembly

Our International General Assembly

By David G. Roebuck

When delegates to the 73rd International General Assembly meet in Orlando, Florida in July, they will be following a 103-year-old practice. For over a century, Church of God members and ministers have gathered to search the Scriptures for answers to contemporary questions and to advance the Church's mission of reaching the harvest.

Purpose and Polity

The International General Assembly is the highest governing body of the Church of God. It meets biennially for worship, fellowship and business and designates the teachings, government, principles and practices of the movement. All members who wish to attend are welcome, and all those over the age of 16 may vote in its business meetings.

The General Assembly elects some officers of the Church of God including the International Executive Committee, and the directors and assistant directors of the departments of Youth and Christian Education, World Missions, and Evangelism and Home Missions.

The Need for an Assembly

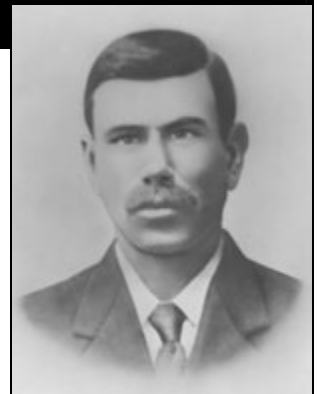
The Church of God traces its birth to the formation of the Christian Union on August 19, 1886. Renamed The Holiness Church in 1902, the movement grew slowly until A.J. Tomlinson joined in 1903 and was selected as pastor. During the next two years he established congregations in Tennessee and Georgia. Growth, of course, brought both new possibilities and new challenges. According to Tomlinson, there was a need for a general meeting "to consider questions of importance and to search the Bible for additional light and knowledge." This reflected the Church's desire to continually seek God's will and to restore New Testament Christianity. Searching the scriptures for a basis for an assembly, they emphasized both the Old Testament gatherings of Israel and the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

This first Assembly of the "Churches of East Tennessee, North Georgia and Western North Carolina" met January 26-27, 1906. Twenty-one people braved the winter weather to gather in the home of Melissa and J.C. Murphy, a Deacon of the Camp Creek, North Carolina, congregation. There they prayed, studied the Scriptures and sought answers to important questions that had emerged.

The printed minutes of that meeting reveal that the delegates desired to restore New Testament Christianity rather than to simply perpetuate a "man-made" denomination. They believed that the existing denominations of their day were poor substitutes for the true New Testament Church, which they sought to be part of. The preface to their minutes read, "We hope and trust that no person or body of people will ever use these minutes, or any part of them, as articles of faith upon which to establish a sect



W.F. Bryant and R.G. Spurling stand in front of the J.C. Murphy house which was the site of the first General Assembly.



A.J. Tomlinson

or denomination. The subjects were discussed merely to obtain light and understanding. Our articles of faith are inspired and given us by the Holy Apostles and written in the New Testament which is our only rule of faith and practice." In its first action, the Assembly declared, "We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only." This declaration reflected their intention to search the scriptures for the laws of God and then recommend a course of action to the local churches. Their congregational polity depended on the local churches to execute God's laws as revealed in the New Testament. These views did not prohibit the Assembly from having executive offices or the general church from developing administrative structures. Indeed, at that first Assembly, A. J. Tomlinson served as moderator and clerk, and in 1909 the Assembly created the office of general moderator. Yet, that first action of the Assembly remains our movement's policy as we recognize that it is not the purpose of the Assembly to make God's laws or to implement God's laws. Rather God's laws are revealed in the New Testament, interpreted by the International General Assembly, and implemented by local congregations.

The topics discussed at that first Assembly reveal the issues with which those early congregations wrestled: keeping local church records, having family worship, building Sunday schools, practicing communion and feet washing, holding weekly prayer meetings, opposing the use of tobacco, and transferring church membership. Evangelism was particularly heavy on their hearts and after hearing reports of recent efforts, the Assembly agreed to "do our best to press into every open door this year and work with greater zeal and energy for the spread of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God than ever before." Further, the delegates recommended an annual Assembly for the purpose of "closer union and fellowship" among the churches. Finally, the Assembly concluded, "It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and us, being assembled with one accord, with the Spirit of Christ in the midst, and after much prayer, discussion, searching the Scriptures and counsel, to recommend these necessary things and that they be ratified and observed by all the local churches. It is the duty of the Church to execute the laws given us by Christ through His Holy Apostles."

A Developing Movement

Through subsequent annual Assemblies, the people sought God and searched the Scriptures in order to develop and define practice and polity. They possessed a deep conviction that the models and truths of the Bible were for our day as well as for the first century. Those early Assembly delegates were convinced that when New Testament order was established, the contemporary Church would reap the same supernatural growth and success the Apostles experienced following the day of Pentecost. Tomlinson wrote, "So when the Church gets in perfect order as it was in apostolic days, the gospel will go forth and souls' [sic] by the multitudes will be gathered in."

Three events at the second Assembly in 1907 are particularly important in the development of our movement. First, the ministers met separately in a "Preacher's Conference." Beginning as an occasional practice, this set a precedent for the ministers to discuss some matters apart from the larger body. This practice led to the development of what is now the International General Council. Today this Council is composed of Ordained Bishops and meets at the beginning of each Assembly. It sets the agenda for the General Assembly business and elects the Council of 18.

Especially important at the second Assembly was the movement's adoption of the name "Church of God," based on Paul's references to the Church of God in First and Second Corinthians. The movement had attempted to be biblical in all things since the 1886 invitation to sit "together as the Church of God." And when he received the right hand of fellowship in 1903, Tomlinson had insisted on an agreement that the Holiness Church at Camp Creek was "the Church of God of the Bible." This adoption of the name "Church of God" in 1907 was a further step toward their understanding that they were restoring the New Testament Church.

Finally, the second Assembly instituted a new order of ministry--that of Evangelist. Up to this time they had recognized the primary orders of Bishop (sometimes called Elder), Deacon and Licensed Minister. In following years the Assembly abandoned the order of Deacon as a credentialed minister and instituted a lay order of Exhorter, which eventually became the initial level of ministry. Today the Church of God recognizes the ministerial ranks of Ordained Bishop, Ordained Minister and Exhorter as well as Licensed Minister of Christian Education and Licensed Minister of Music. There is also a Lay Minister certification for specialized areas of local church ministry.



1st General Assembly Minutes

Other important matters of polity that have developed in succeeding Assemblies include the 1909 selection of a general moderator to serve year-round (renamed general overseer in 1910) and the appointment of state overseers in 1911. An Elders Council was adopted in 1916 to conduct necessary business between Assemblies. Because of the heavy workload of the general overseer, the 1922 Assembly selected a three-person committee comprised of the general overseer, a superintendent of education, and an editor and publisher. Now known as the International Executive Committee, this body oversees the ongoing ministry of the international church and eventually expanded to include the general overseer, three assistant general overseers and the secretary general.

Continuing Ministry

The record of General Assemblies often emphasizes changes in institutional structure and leadership, and these have been important activities and consequences of the past 100 years. But the history of denominational structure and polity pales compared to the story of millions of men and women who have been won to Christ, nurtured, and sent into the harvest through the many ministries of the Church of God. Today seven million members assemble themselves in congregations around the world, and thousands will come together in Orlando to continue the biblical practice of searching the Scriptures. Now 104 years after our first Assembly, we are grateful for what God did through those first 21 delegates, and we can testify to their zeal and to the zeal and accomplishments of those who have come after them.

Some Historical Highlights

- 1906 First General Assembly
- 1907 Name "Church of God" adopted
- 1909 Office of general overseer created (as general moderator)
- 1911 First state overseers {administrative bishops) appointed
- 1913 Two General Assemblies (January and November)
- 1915 Slandorous title "Holy Rollers" repudiated
- 1916 Council of 18 instituted as "Elders Council"
- 1918 No General Assembly due to the flue epidemic
- 1921 Dedication of Assembly Auditorium in Cleveland, Tennessee
- 1922 Executive Committee established
- 1924 First General Assembly youth service
- 1928 General overseer F.J. Lee died during the Assembly
- 1929 The Church of God Young People's Endeavor adopted
- 1936 Ladies' Willing Workers Band (Women's Ministries) begun
- 1945 World War II ended during the Assembly
- 1946 First Youth Congress preceded Assembly
- 1946 Last annual Assembly
- 1948 Declaration of Faith adopted
- 1960 Resolution on Holiness adopted
- 1962 First Teen Talent winners ministered in Assembly service
- 1986 Church of God centennial celebrated
- 1992 Women granted right to vote in General Assembly
- 2000 Ministerial offices renamed ordained bishop and ordained minister
- 2004 Seven Commitments to Mission and Vision adopted

