

How the Church of God “Speaks”
Bob Moss, Chief Advancement Officer
Church of God Ministries
Anderson, Indiana

After spending more than thirty-five years in pastoral ministry, I’ve accepted the assignment of serving as the chief advancement officer at Church of God Ministries. Among my responsibilities is the oversight of communication to the church and on behalf of the church. My years as a pastor, as well as my two-term role as chair of the General Assembly, has provided me a perspective on the question, Who speaks for the Church of God?

Recent headlines have brought increased requests for statements from Church of God Ministries regarding the position of the Church of God movement on various subjects. This article serves to provide perspective on the polity of our church and how we have chosen to work together and speak together.

Who speaks for the Church of God?

From the earliest days of the Church of God, the Bible has served as our only rule of faith. We’ve listened to the Holy Spirit for direction, and called out “man-rule” in all its forms. As such, no one person has ever officially spoken on behalf of the movement. The Church of God is a group of loosely affiliated congregations that function independently by design and cooperatively by choice. As such, the General Assembly—comprised of Church of God credentialed ministers, representative lay delegates, and heads of our endorsed and affiliated agencies—is the only authorized voice of the Church of God. Church of God Ministries exists to serve the needs of the General Assembly, and does not speak independently of the General Assembly. One of the ways Church of God Ministries functions is to compile the records and report how the General Assembly speaks.

As Barry Callen has written*, “while remaining a voluntary body, [the General Assembly] has become very influential in the oversight of most of the movement’s cooperative ministries based in [the United States and Canada]...[This is sometimes] accomplished by the influence of its united voice when a consensus can be reached on issues of common concern...Being the most representative body of the movement...on many occasions the General Assembly has spoken its corporate opinion to Church of God congregations, the national agencies, and the society at large. It has announced convictions and sounded warnings. It has attempted to encourage vision, influence opinion, gather resources, and mobilize effort.”

*Barry Callen (ed.), *The Assembly Speaks* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1985), 7–8.

The General Assembly is an effective Christian body demonstrating evidence of the Holy Spirit working in our midst. It’s a wonderful example of charismatic church government—that is, a body led by the Spirit of Jesus. On occasion, resolutions are passed by the General Assembly that address our common-held theological values and beliefs. Through this means, the Church of God speaks. Seldom do we speak with a unanimous voice, but we speak with the understanding that unity does not require unanimity.

What about the General Director, Jim Lyon?

Jim is a respected leader, an influential voice, and one who has clearly helped our church body to clarify our purpose. In 2013 he accepted the assignment to lead the work of Church of God Ministries, the organization that exists to coordinate and carry out the work of the General Assembly as directed by the Ministries Council.

In his recent report to the General Assembly, Jim said: “I find myself, in ways I would not have imagined, pastoring, as general director, attempting to lovingly discourage unhealthy patterns while encouraging grace to clothe honest and direct interpersonal communication.”

Jim has written a response to the recent SCOTUS decision on same-sex marriage. His words, always pastoral, are intended to guide us in our thinking and in our conversation with one another, but never to usurp the voice of the General Assembly or the Ministries Council (which makes decisions on behalf of the assembly when it is not in session).

Our executive team at Church of God Ministries joins with Jim Lyon in urging you to minister with grace and compassion, while at the same time standing firm on the biblical definition of marriage. There are few families or congregations in this movement that have not been affected by homosexuality. We pray with you that the Holy Spirit will always be evident in our words and in our attitudes.

What has the General Assembly said about same-sex marriage?

The issues surrounding homosexuality have been addressed by the General Assembly four times in the past, beginning in 1979. The text of the last three resolutions are provided below:

Homosexuality (June 1993)

The General Assembly has, from time to time, deemed it appropriate to speak to the church regarding matters of spiritual, social and ethical importance. In 1979 the Assembly passed a resolution titled “Statement Against Homosexuality.” Since then the subject has emerged with spirited discussion in the public arena. It seems timely, therefore, that the Assembly once again address the subject with biblical conviction, compassion, and caring:

WHEREAS, there is a current national focus on homosexuality, frequently viewing it as an acceptable alternative lifestyle; and

WHEREAS, there is a long-standing biblical evidence that a homosexual life-style is perverse and destructive to individuals and society; and

WHEREAS, we in the Church of God are committed to biblical holiness and hold in high regard scriptural injunction related to homosexuality and therefore cannot accept, endorse or condone homosexual behavior; and

WHEREAS, we believe that the sexual relationship between man and woman within the bonds of marriage is viewed as something natural and beautiful—ordained by God; and

WHEREAS, we are a redemptive body and seek to express love, compassion, and concern for those who struggle with sexual identity or homosexual orientation to assist them in a chaste relationship in Christ; there for be it

RESOLVED, that the General Assembly call on congregational and institutional leaders of the Church of God to demonstrate love and provide counsel and materials to assist families and

persons confused or distressed by homosexual behavior and to bring redemption and wholeness to those persons/ be it further
 RESOLVED, that we respectfully urge all persons inclined toward homosexual behavior to seek the grace of God and such other aid and counsel as may be conducive to their relief; be it further
 RESOLVED, however, that the General Assembly of the Church of God go on record affirming our conviction that, biblically, we believe homosexual behavior is sin; be it further
 RESOLVED, that the General Assembly stands firmly opposed to the licensing, ordination, or approving for leadership those who are involved in this life-style; be it finally
 RESOLVED, that the General Assembly supports instruction which brings understanding to issues related to homosexuality, but opposes instruction which endorses or promotes homosexual behavior as an acceptable alternative or Christian life-style.

**JUNE 29–30, 2004 General Assembly Meeting Minutes:
 Resolution Regarding Same-Sex Marriage**

Whereas, the Church of God upholds the sanctity of family and the institution of marriage; and
 Whereas, the current topic about same-sex marriage is being debated in North America and other nations of the world and is identified under various titles: “Civil Union”, “Gay Marriage”, “Same Sex Unions”, “Equal Marriage”, “Equal Partnership”, etc.; and
 Whereas, this assembly in session June 1993 affirmed a resolution which stated our position of homosexuality as a sin and therefore to be rejected; and
 Whereas, the issues of homosexual partnerships continue to be a cause of concern and disunity within society in general and the church particular; and
 Whereas, there is action pending before Congress regarding the definition of marriage.

Be it therefore resolved: that this assembly, the 86th Session General Assembly of the Church of God, go on record as supporting the definition of marriage as a union between one woman and one man; and
 Be it finally resolved: that official communication stating this position be facilitated between this assembly and the members of the United States Congress; and that they be encouraged to pass legislation to enshrine the historical definition of marriage in United States Law.

The motion was seconded and carried by voice vote.

[<http://www.choginmi.org/Media/1993And2004GeneralAssemblyResolutionsRegardingHomosexuality.pdf>]

**Resolution on Ministerial/Facility Protection
 Against Forced Officiating/Hosting of Same-Sex Marriages
 (adopted by the 96th General Assembly of the Church of God, June 26, 2014)**

WHEREAS, the ultimate authority for the Church of God movement (Anderson) is biblical revelation; and
 WHEREAS, biblical revelation is understood by this movement to teach the appropriateness of a sexual relationship only between a man and a woman within the bonds of marriage (General Assembly resolution of June, 1993); and
 WHEREAS, biblical revelation is understood by this movement to teach that marriage is the sacred union of one woman and one man (General Assembly resolution of June, 2004); and

WHEREAS, the most recent edition (2011) of the Credentials Manual for Church of God ministers/chaplains in North America states in section 2.13 that “those to whom vocational credentialing is granted are expected to hold persuasions that are in general agreement with the teaching tradition of the Church of God movement”; and

WHEREAS, current legal trends and changing social practices threaten to bring pressure on pastors/chaplains of the Church of God to officiate at "marriage" ceremonies that are contrary to biblical revelation and thus to Church of God beliefs and expectations of its credentialed ministers/chaplains; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly, convened in June, 2014, hereby reaffirms its traditional understandings of and sincerely-held religious beliefs about sexuality, marriage, and its related expectation of appropriate pastor/chaplain practice in these regards; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly recommend that all national and local entities of the Church of God (Anderson) consider establishing policies that restrict the use of their facilities from same-sex marriages.

[Resolution -- Ministerial/Facility Protection Against Forced Officiating/Hosting of Same-Sex Marriages adopted by the 96th General Assembly of the Church of God Page 1 of 1]

[<http://www.jesusisthesubject.org/files/downloads/documents/ga/ResolutionMinisterial-FacilityProtectionAgainstForcedOfficiating-HostingOfSame-SexMarriages.pdf>]

These resolutions from the General Assembly have been provided to in order to give you documentation on how the Church of God speaks together as a body. There is no doubt that in days to come, we will continue to grapple with these and other issues that affect our culture. For this reason, the ChoG Table is being introduced as a forum where these subjects can be prayerfully discussed at length in view of Scripture.

The greatest hope of Church of God Ministries is that the members of the General Assembly will recognize the importance of attendance in meetings where crucial resolutions are passed. We desire to see the strengthening of the Assembly’s voice to the church by the re-engagement of our qualified members in crucial decisions.

We are praying for our pastors and our congregations as you serve as the people of Jesus in the midst of the shifting sands of culture.

Jesus is the subject.

Bob Moss,
July 2, 2015