

Manual

for field churches



Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), and He’s doing that today. A church can be defined in many ways, but essentially it is represented by believers who are connected in spiritual fellowship through the Holy Spirit, shared doctrinal beliefs, and a similar mission. Once people begin to worship and fellowship together with shared goals it is not unusual for them to seek fellowship with others of like mind. The details involved in organizing those in the assembly are fundamental to becoming a church.

People write to us asking, “How do we become part of the Church of God International?” They want to know what they have to do to become “officially identified” with the CGI’s teachings, spiritual heritage, and culture. Offering guidance on how to become part of the CGI is the purpose of this booklet.

It helps to know there is a great difference between the *spiritual organism*—those led by the Holy Spirit and the *physical organization*—the legal entity.

The Church of God is composed of Spirit-filled Christians who constitute the Body of Christ. They are the many branches connected to the Vine, who is Christ (John 15:5). The true church is a spiritual organism which knows no corporate boundaries. Some have mistakenly thought of the many different church organizations as the branches. This is simply not true. Individual Christians are the branches. The spiritual should not be confused with the physical. When you are baptized, you are baptized “into the name of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), not into any church organization.

On the other hand, the CGI is a physical corporation chartered under the laws of the State of Texas whose purpose is to direct the efforts of *some* in the spiritual organism through its organizational strengths. Members of the spiritual organism voluntarily worship together to fulfill the common purposes of preaching and publishing the gospel. This involves, but is not limited to supporting a media outreach to “seek those who are lost,” while being cognizant of how best to serve the fatherless, the widow, and the poor, and “feeding the flock” (John 21:15–17).

The basic answer to “How do we become part of the Church of God International?” is this: The CGI is a body of Christians united by the Holy Spirit who voluntarily are also united into an organization to perform a common work. Just as the Holy Spirit directs each Christian in his individual daily life, so the CGI organization gives direction to its members to perform a common work. That work is defined concisely in Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

It is the intention of the CGI and its ministry to provide a strong sense of direction to our members and those who turn to us for association and fellowship. To that purpose this manual will provide organizational guidance for those groups who identify with the mission supported by CGI members. The suggestions that will be offered are given to promote a strong sense of unity among those who wish to work together in serving God’s people.

Those of us in the CGI realize there are groups and individuals who have a negative reaction to “organized religion.” It’s as if anything that’s organized is bad, and of course that isn’t true. Why do some feel loyalty to Christ is a good thing, yet loyalty to an organization is a bad thing? This type of thinking is often based on bad experiences with past affiliations. Knowing how members react to gross mismanagement or abuse, their reservation to trust another organization is understandable. Trust has to be earned and it’s earned over time. To be associated with the CGI means one has time to see

if we are who we say we are. One has time to determine if they are willing to walk shoulder to shoulder with like-minded people, serving God through recommended procedures and organizational guidelines. Is the CGI organization perfect? Absolutely not—no organization of man is perfect whether it’s a local home fellowship (which is organized) or corporate entity. Each group must be judged by its fruit. If the fruits of an organization/congregation are bad, then one should look elsewhere.

Once a group or congregation determines they want to work more closely with the CGI, they are welcome to pursue becoming an affiliated congregation or chartered church. In either case, the least that’s expected is a willingness to speak honorable of each other while striving to serve God’s people. This relationship will of necessity involve doctrinal agreement and organizational cooperation. Requesting affiliation or a charter implies those involved voluntarily accept and agree to abide by the guidelines advanced in this manual.

Becoming a Church

We are frequently asked, “When can we have a church in our town?” “What does it take to start a church?” What follows is information to acquaint you with how the CGI develops and establishes affiliated groups and chartered churches. This information contains definitions of terms, expectations, and requirements for affiliated and fellowship groups, chartered churches, and other pertinent information for CGI field churches. It is our hope that all those who are interested in becoming part of the CGI will be prayerfully attentive to their meaning and intent.

Logically, the first step in becoming a church is the necessity to have members. A church is literally an “assembly” of God’s people. However, the Bible is silent on a specific number necessary for starting a church. The Ministerial Council of the CGI has determined that a local church charter will be granted only when there are at least twelve baptized members in regular attendance. This requirement, however, does not keep us from working with smaller groups to potentially bring them to the level of being chartered.

Essential Activities of a Local Church

Those wishing to progress toward becoming a local chartered

congregation of the CGI should be aware of the essential activities of a local church. Basically, there are four:

1) Worship: This involves prayer, songs of praise, and, in general, honoring God with our presence.

2) Edification: In the simplest terms, preaching and teaching, either live or through media resources (CDS, DVDS, web cast, pod casting) or it can also involve the advice and encouragement received from conversations with brethren.

3) Fellowship: Simply being together. Fellowship involves mutual exhortation, encouragement, consolation, and sometimes admonition.

4) Service: This includes assisting the needy, visiting, encouraging, and helping the sick as well as all other forms of Christian service. These can, of course, be done individually, but can be effectively coordinated by the local church. As for the form of church services or worship, we do not find this outlined in the Bible in such a way as to give us a permanent or specific method of worship. In fact, Paul made significant modifications in routine assemblies (1 Corinthians 14). No one questioned Paul's authority to restrict the number of speakers—apparently unrestricted before (1 Corinthians 14:29)—or to prohibit the use of tongues (different known languages) unless an interpreter was present (1 Corinthians 14:26–28). The Ministerial Council of the CGI, out of respect for tradition and present-day influences, has made recommendations for “orderly” and edifying worship. Individual congregations may elect to some degree to modify their manner of worship, responding to different needs at different times and places. Major departures from the generally recommended format should be reached after consultation with both members and ministers. If an agreeable consensus cannot be reached through these local means, the various issues can be taken to the Ministerial Council for consideration.

Independent Affiliated Churches

From time to time, at the discretion of the Ministerial Council, the CGI will enter into a cooperative relationship with separately incorporated churches. This cooperation may include baptism, festival attendance, church attendance, counseling, anointing, youth programs, or other specified activities. Requirements for this relation-

ship include doctrinal agreement; support of the CGI, its programs, and its leadership; a record of fiscal responsibility; stability; a record of care for the brethren; and some form of participatory governance. *Autocratic or authoritarian governance is at variance with the basic values of the CGI and its culture of servant-leadership.*

Mutual responsibilities will include cooperation, moral support, and mutual respect. There will be no interference in the affairs of another church, and no attempts to draw away or disaffect members.

The CGI accepts a high degree of responsibility to a chartered church but assumes no responsibility for the actions of independent affiliates. A CGI minister may be willing to help an independent affiliate and does so without accepting compensation beyond expenses or honoraria.

The decision of whether a particular independent minister and/or church can be recognized as an affiliate of the CGI belongs exclusively to the Ministerial Council. We also recommend CGI ministers and local contacts consult with their regional director before arranging joint services with independent groups, inviting guest speakers (who do not carry CGI ministerial credentials or speaking credentials), or pursuing other activities with independent groups.

More often than not an independent church seeking affiliation with the CGI will have a resident minister, someone who either carries their credentials or is officially recognized as their pastor/elder. The CGI will acknowledge that appointment. However, this acknowledgement does not imply or affirm the resident minister will automatically receive credentials from the CGI. If the resident minister decides to seek CGI credentials he should address his desire to the Ministerial Council. The Ministerial Council, after reviewing the background and qualifications of the “applicant,” will make recommendations that, if followed, could lead to recognition as a CGI minister. Most likely the Council will request the applicant to become involved in the MAP (Ministerial Apprentice Program) training sessions. Depending upon the applicant's experience, doctrinal understanding, and support for servant-leadership, the Council might recommend an abbreviated program for appointment to the CGI ministry. (The basic requirements and qualities for becoming a CGI minister are presented on pages 18 through 21 of this manual.)

Extended Church

For families who do not have a local congregation to attend, we offer two services, one we call “the extended church,” the other is a live web cast. These services have proven to be extremely helpful for engaging and serving our “scattered” brethren of “like mind.” We also offer counseling by letter, phone, or e-mail to those involved in the extended church.

- The extended church: Those who wish to receive weekly sermons via CD or DVD need to contact us and they will be enrolled in this free program. Enrollment in the extended church does not convey an official status or recognition with the CGI.
- Live web cast: Those who have a computer with broadband capabilities are invited to join in weekly Sabbath services through a live web cast. (The available web casts are listed on the CGI home page: www.cgi.org.)

In the absence of a local congregation, families are encouraged to meet together for fellowship and listen to or view the weekly sermons. Those unable to attend a weekly worship service are encouraged to plan ahead and try to attend regional holy day meetings and the Feast of Tabernacles. If, after a period of time, those in regular attendance begin to consider organizing into a church or to rent meeting facilities, they should seek ministerial oversight.

Where two or more families are meeting together, resist allowing someone to appoint himself as a teacher or preacher (see the section entitled “The Speaking Credential”). There is no greater source of confusion and disharmony than disputes over leadership—particularly when it comes to someone wanting to be in front of the congregation. If such a concern arises, please talk to your local CGI minister for direction and counsel.

Out of concern for confidentiality we are reluctant to give out the names of our extended church families to other people—even to other extended church families. This caution is exercised because it is impossible for us to know and vouch for everyone. We trust that extended church families will find each other quickly when they attend regional holy-day services or special meetings.

Fellowship Groups

When a group decides they want to worship and serve within the “umbrella” of the CGI, this can be accomplished by communicating to the Ministerial Council. The Ministerial Council will respond by appointing someone to work with the group as they transition into becoming an “official” fellowship group. Once the group has met together long enough to provide a sense of stability and unity they can petition the Ministerial Council, in writing, of their desire to be recognized as a fellowship group and to have a minister appointed as their pastor. The Council will work with the fellowship group in selecting a minister to provide pastoral oversight to their fellowship group. Without Ministerial Council support, local CGI ministers are not presumed to have pastoral responsibility for the group. If there are no ministers living close by, the regional director or someone from the home office may assume oversight, but only under the direction of the Ministerial Council.

Fellowship groups function as a church, and are in most respects conducted as a church. They simply are too small for the formal structure and requirements of a chartered church. Fellowship groups will tend to be more formal than family groups, and less formal than a chartered church.

Brethren in fellowship groups should be prepared to make certain transitions over time. For example, while it may be acceptable to eat and drink while listening to a CD or DVD in someone’s home, it is not appropriate for church services. Whenever you meet in fellowship, worship should be organized to bring glory to God. This extends to our physical appearance before God and our behavior (preaching, singing, and praying) in His presence.

Chartered Churches

Why become a chartered church of the CGI? Here are a few of the benefits that come with being chartered:

- 1) Tax benefits for all donations made to the church, both to the home office and locally.
- 2) Referrals of those interested in joining in worship with local congregations.
- 3) Ministerial oversight and group access to servant-eldership/leadership development programs.

4) To be partnered with a work/mission that extends beyond the ordinary activities of the local congregation.

5) Become the focus of the credentialed ministry to make every effort to meet regularly with chartered congregations.

6) Congregational recognition on the published list of CGI's chartered congregations.

The Board of Trustees and the Ministerial Council have granted permission to issue a charter to field churches who meet these conditions:

1) The group must be composed of at least twelve (12) baptized members who are in regular attendance.

2) A minister with CGI credentials should meet with the group on a "regular" basis, meaning at least a minimum of once a quarter if not more frequently.

3) If the congregation wants to have a local church council, they should involve the minister-of-record in leading the process. Those men and women interested in serving on the local church council should meet the qualifications discussed later in this *Manual for Field Churches*. (Church councils and their function are discussed on pages 13–15.) It should be clearly understood that a local church council does not "run" the church, but oversees the *physical* duties and responsibilities of caring for a church under the direction of the pastor or minister-of-record. The CGI Ministerial Council recommends that a local church council have five to seven members. When the local church moves forward with an election, the slate of candidates should have the approval of the congregation and the minister-of-record. No one should be nominated to serve on the local church council if they exhibit gross un-Christian behavior, display an unruly and uncooperative attitude, do not have a good reputation inside the church and in their local community, or cause division and dissension in the church. It's recommended that local churches have an annual meeting to re-elect current council members and to, if necessary, elect new members. For the sake of continuity, no more than two or three members should be added in a given year, unless there are extenuating circumstances (i.e., church split, loss of council members through natural or unexpected causes, reorganization, etc.) *A chartered congregation does not have to have a local church council if the congregation is carrying out the council's general functions.* Most small churches function well without a local church council.

4) The members should have met together regularly in harmony for at least three months.

5) A charter application must be submitted which accepts the Constitution and Bylaws of the Church of God International, as well as the fundamental and essential teachings of the church. No local bylaws are required or desired.

6) An up-to-date church roll should be maintained with names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of all in attendance. (This information is never to be distributed to unauthorized people or used for any other purpose than communicating appropriate announcements or helpful information to the members. The church roll does not become the property of a disaffected member and should never be used as a resource for unwanted solicitation or in any way to malign and attack members of the church or ministry. The church roll is the property of the duly recognized chartered church.)

7) A chartered church may be separately incorporated but only with the written permission of the CGI Board of Directors. That permission may be granted in order to meet specific local needs and problems or in some cases international law.

8) Chartered churches are asked to provide quarterly financial reports to the local congregation with a copy to their minister-of-record and regional director. If a congregation persistently refuses to provide financial reports, the CGI Ministerial Council may choose to withdraw that church's charter. The charter status may be restored by bringing reports up to date.

Six months after the original charter application, the pastor of the church should provide confirmation to the Ministerial Council that the local congregation has borne fruit; demonstrated an attitude of unity, brotherly love, and care for one another; and is fully qualified to care for those whom God will add to the church. When this confirmation is received, the Ministerial Council will, at their discretion, issue a charter for the local church.

Should a church lose its minister for any reason, the local council member or leading members shall notify the regional director or a member of the Ministerial Council immediately.

Local Church Funds

A chartered church may establish a local fund and open a bank account in the name of the Church of God International. Unless there are special circumstances, it is recommended that local church funds *do not exceed three times the budgeted needs for one month*. When special needs arise, the congregation is advised to discuss those circumstances with the regional director.

It should be understood by all chartered churches and those wishing to be chartered that all local funds and physical assets are held in *fiduciary trust* and come under the extended responsibility of the Church of God International, Tyler, Texas, and its governing board. Local funds are not the property of the local church treasurer or the person with check-writing privileges for the local bank account. If a member or members of a congregation wish to withdraw their CGI affiliation, their leaving does *not entitle* them to any of the financial and physical assets of the congregation. The financial and physical assets remain the responsibility of those remaining with the CGI. If the entire church chooses to separate from the CGI, the financial and physical assets will become the responsibility of the regional director or a designated agent of the CGI. This includes, local monies, song-books, video and audio equipment, and other materials/items used in fellowship. If the departing members want access to or request some of the assets, the allocation of said assets will be determined through agreement with the regional director/designated agent of the CGI and a representative of those who have left.

Over the years we have had unfortunate experiences related to the accruing and management of local church funds. These concerns do not normally involve “smaller” amounts of money set aside to cover expenses for a love fund, flowers for church, special holy-day hall rentals, emergencies, and such things. Disgruntled people are less likely to stage an “all-out fight” over lesser amounts of local funds. This is the reason behind our caution against accruing “large” amounts of local monies.

The local church account exists *solely to meet the needs* of the local congregation. Local funds normally accrue through charitable giving (over and above the tithes and offerings sent to the home office) collected through a donation box or local church bank account. Most of our congregations, after exceeding the recommend-

ed amount for local expenses, choose to send the “excess” to the home office. Annual holy-day offerings are collected locally and sent to the home office. They should remain sealed and be mailed registered (return receipt requested).

The CGI is a nonprofit corporation subject to the regulations of the Internal Revenue Service. Both the pastor and the local church/council are responsible for seeing to it that the treasurer keeps accurate and complete records as required by law. The treasurer must keep a record of each contribution including the name of the donor (anonymous if appropriate) and the date and amount of each donation. Receipts should be issued and balanced against bank deposits.

The church treasurer should also keep a record of all expenditures including dates, amounts, purpose, and who authorized the expenditure. These records must be available to authorized examiners of the church upon reasonable notice, and a quarterly summary of income and expenses should be presented to the entire church and the regional director. Members are advised *not* to contribute to a local fund where such reports are not forthcoming in a timely manner.

Local Church Councils

The objective of having a local church council is to involve the lay membership in the decision-making process of the local church.

The council is not elected to manage, govern, or otherwise “run” the church. Rather they are servants of the church in the areas covered by their duties, and counselors to the pastor of the church.

At the pastor’s/minister-of-record’s direction, a local church council may be created preparatory to an application for charter. The brethren will elect, under the pastor’s/minister-of-record’s supervision, from five to seven members to serve as a local church council. Until a church has reached substantial size, there is no need for a local council. In the meantime, the pastor/minister-of-record will work with the church, encouraging everyone involved in the decisions affecting the group, and teaching them the responsibilities involved in self-governance.

When a congregation wants to have a local council they should discuss their desire with the pastor/minister-of-record. Unless there are extenuating circumstances known by the pastor/minister-of-record, he will cooperate with the congregation to prepare a slate of

perspective council members. He will review, with the congregation, the qualifications of council members. Anyone not wishing to serve should notify the pastor/minister-of-record. The pastor/minister-of-record may also omit from the list of council candidates anyone he feels should not serve, but he must explain his reasons privately in advance to those concerned. (While ministerial ethics may prevent a minister from explaining his actions publicly, he may be called on to explain them to the Ministerial Council.)

The pastor/minister-of-record and two witnesses will tabulate the ballots and announce the results. New council members shall assume their responsibilities immediately. A local council should have a chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer. With advance notice, quarterly meetings should be scheduled. Other meetings can be conducted as circumstances might suggest.

Qualifications of Council Members

Council members should be mature, long-standing, baptized members with a good reputation in the community and a record of service to God's people. They should be in regular church attendance and known to be sober, hospitable, and a good example in the conduct of their lives. It is essential that the local council members be strong supporters of the CGI, its goals and its programs. (CAUTION: A council member who prefers a church that is more or less independent, or who is critical of CGI, its structure, its ministry, or its policies, is bound to be a divisive influence on the council, no matter how good a person he or she is.)

No more than *one member of an immediate family* may serve on the council at the same time. The definition of "immediate" is to be understood to include the following: spouse, parent, child, siblings, and in-laws.

Those wishing to serve as local council members should be actively (and visibly) supporting the CGI's beliefs, including Sabbath and holy-day observance. It should be the goal of each council member (and all CGI members) to attend a CGI sponsored festival site, though that is not a requirement. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, local congregations should not sponsor "stay at home" festivals.

Duties of Council Members

The pastor/minister-of-record and the congregation will rely on council members to serve the needs of the local membership (arranging rides to church and holy days, suggesting community projects, providing a suitable place for church, responding to the local minister/deacon by allocating funds to members, accounting for church assets, etc.). Council members and the congregation will rely on the pastor/minister-of-record to take care of such responsibilities as the local speaking schedule, leadership training, organizing worship services, counseling, baptizing, anointing, arranging the holy-day services, and providing spiritual oversight for the congregation. Council members and the pastor/minister-of-record should complement and cooperatively work with each other in the service they bring to the congregation.

The following describe areas of cooperation between the council members and the pastor/minister-of-record:

1) Selection and appointment of council officers: chairman, treasurer, secretary. (The chairman is to lead the meeting according to Robert's Rules of Order. The treasurer has the duty of creating a local church fund to meet local church expenses. The secretary is to take minutes of meetings and to participate in the accumulation of an up-to-date church roll, with names, addresses [including e-mail], and phone numbers.)

2) Arranging for a meeting place with all necessary equipment and supplies.

3) To keep accurate and up-to-date records of local donations and disbursements. The amount of money collected and the disbursement records should be available by request to the congregation and the regional director.

4) To conduct timely business meetings with the membership to discuss such matters as the church's financial status, current projects, and ideas for utilizing the resources (people/money, etc.) available to the congregation, etc. These meetings could be held quarterly, bi-annually, or annually.

5) Assisting those in need.

6) To encourage festival attendance among the members (preferably at a CGI location) by organizing shared transportation and housing.

7) To consult with each other, including the pastor/minister-of-record, on all decisions or needs affecting the congregation.

Deacons

A careful review of the New Testament reveals that all members of the Body of Christ are called to serve. Each has their own place/work within the body. The privilege of serving extends to all men and women and is encouraged in the church with or without recognition.

In due time, the various “gifts” possessed (or developed) by individual members may set them apart for “appointed” leadership. With scriptural example through the early church in Jerusalem, two general categories of leadership emerge. They are represented in the twelve apostles and “the seven,” who we know as deacons. The earliest mention of the seven deacons is in Acts 6. Here we find why the seven were chosen. They were selected because they were gifted to serve a growing membership with “daily” administration. This leadership role then allowed the apostles to do what they were most gifted to accomplish. Acts 6:2 tells us that the twelve said, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” Verse 4 tells us that the apostles were to “continually” give themselves “to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

Generally speaking, the apostles were those “set aside” through their verbal gifts, whereas deacons (Greek: *diakonos*) were noted for their “deeds” and their penchant to serve. First Peter 4:11 demonstrates how these two “offices” within the Body of Christ functioned. Some are to speak and others are to serve “as the ability which God gives: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” Colossians 3:17 reinforces this distinction with “whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

With this background, we can make a general reference to a “difference” between what is expected from “elders” (which the twelve were) and “deacons.” Simply put, an elder is to give himself to prayer and preaching to the “world” and/or the church while a deacon is to assist with the “business” of those with whom they fellowship and worship. This does not mean that a deacon cannot preach (because Philip, one of the seven, left Jerusalem to give his time to preaching [Act 8:4–40], and was known as an evangelist [Acts 21:8]), nor that an elder cannot conduct church “business” or “serve tables.” But, even though service by either “appointment” may overlap, the gifts possessed by both tend to be much stronger in one area or another.

First Timothy 3 lists many of the more observable qualities for both elders and deacons. It is clear that both must be of irreproachable character and possess godly wisdom. It is also clear that the nature of the *diaconate* (deacons) is not teaching or governing. Deacons were helpers of the people and involved in daily administrations of the church’s charity. Their willingness to serve locally, without the unction to travel and preach, allowed the elders to leave the flock and evangelize. The deacons and elders worked together, complementing each other’s gifts for serving those that were “called” and those that were “lost.” In a practical sense, elders should defer to the gifts of those who are deacons and vice-versa. For example, if deacons were asked to anoint someone they would defer to the elders (James 5); if elders were asked to oversee the distribution to the saints, they would defer to deacons.

Elders and deacons are a complement to the unity of the church. In our fellowship, elders are not spiritually “above” deacons; nor is one leadership role considered more important than the other. The apostle (and elder) Paul cautions every Christian “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3).

Today, the CGI continues in the example of the early church with the appointment of elders and deacons. In the pattern of Acts 6:3, members of a congregation should recommend candidates for deacon/deaconess to the elders. The congregation’s recommendations will be considered by the ministry through the qualifications presented in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Prior to ordination, the pastor/minister should consult with the regional director. Once the ordination has occurred, the regional director should be notified and a record of the ordination should be provided to the Secretary of the Ministerial Council by way of letter. (A list of all registered deacons is maintained at the home office.)

The deacons will serve their local congregation in cooperation with the pastor/minister-of-record. Since deacons are nominated and ordained locally, a deacon will not automatically carry this appointment to a new or different congregation. If the new congregation asks that the transferring deacon be recognized as such in their group, then with the cooperation of the new church’s membership and ministry

(pastor/minister-of-record), the deacon can be recognized/appointed to serve as a deacon to the local congregation. There is no reason to ordain him/her again.

In the CGI we recognize that ordination does not authorize anyone to preach or administer, nor does it convey the Holy Spirit. Both elders and deacons are to be already filled with the Holy Spirit before official ordination. We count it a privilege to acknowledge all members of the Body of Christ and responsibly seek out from among ourselves those that God has gifted to serve in word and deed.

Duties of Ministers

1) To properly take care of their own families (1 Timothy 5:8). Most ministers in the CGI are not salaried and must pursue their own jobs or careers. The brethren should therefore exercise discretion in making demands on their minister's time which may interfere with his job or his family.

2) To oversee the church. Jesus Christ invested the ministry with the responsibility to provide servant-leadership to His church. As a servant to the people he does not exercise authority as a "lord over God's heritage." In the event that a CGI minister abuses the privilege of service, he is first of all responsible to those he serves and then to the Ministerial Council. With the cooperation of the minister, the Ministerial Council will do what it can (oversight, counseling, etc.) to help him work through his problems. This may involve—but is not limited to, a suspension, a sabbatical, or a revocation of his credentials.

3) To feed the flock—not necessarily to do it all himself, but to see to it that it is done. In the Church of God International, the Sabbath service program is the responsibility of the ministry. With support from the congregation, the pastor is encouraged to work with and train men in public speaking. They should be gifted with biblical understanding, a grasp of speaking fundamentals, and a desire to go before the church. Once they have acquired certain speaking skills and have gained the confidence of the congregation and the support of the pastor, they can (and should) be recognized as a credentialed speaker. This designation opens the door for them to speak without the pastor being present and to speak in other CGI congregations. A pastor may invite someone to speak who isn't credentialed but should do so only if he (the pastor), another CGI minister, or credentialed

speaker is present. Weekly sermons can also be provided through audio or visual means including live webcasts available through the CGI website, www.cgi.org.

4) As time permits, to make himself available to members for ministerial duties such as counseling, baptism, weddings, funerals, and prayer.

5) To arrange cooperative services on holy days, pulling area churches together whenever practical. To whatever degree is acceptable to the congregation, he should seek to "build bridges" and extend the hand of fellowship to brethren outside the CGI.

6) To encourage attendance of all members at the Feast of Tabernacles. *Note:* It is the responsibility of the home office to establish and/or recommend sites for CGI festival worship. Members are invited to recommend locations that fit a variety of requirements, including but not limited to: number of CGI people the location will serve, convenience, leasing costs for the facilities, number of break-out rooms, contractual obligation, cost to members, long-term availability, cleanliness, equipment quality, parking arrangement, community restrictions, local activities, etc.

7) To live and maintain a lifestyle according to the highest ethical standards of the ministry.

8) To provide servant-leadership training to members of the congregation. Help members to identify and use their natural and spiritual gifts.

9) To recommend qualified men to the Ministerial Council for involvement in the MAP (Ministerial Apprentice Program).

10) In the spirit of the admonition to "be subject one to another," to hold himself accountable to the ministry at large and the Ministerial Council in particular, but at all times maintaining his ultimate accountability to Jesus Christ.

11) To supervise the nomination and election of members to a local church council. For the sake of consistency and organization, it's recommended that this be done within the first month after the Feast of Tabernacles.

Ethical Responsibilities of a Minister

Once a man is ordained into the ministry, he is expected to adhere to and follow the guidelines provided in the *Ministerial Handbook*.

One section of the handbook covers a “Code of Conduct for the Ministry.” Although we hope it never happens, we realize ministers can violate the honor bestowed upon them with ordination. When this happens, those involved *must be held accountable* for their actions. Serving in the ministry demands that certain ethical values must not be compromised. Ministers are always held to the same high standard they had to meet before they were ordained.

Ministers should be an example to the congregation (and to the world) even in matters of disagreement, defection, and ministerial discipline. Although we tend to always look at ministerial responsibilities under the best of situations, we must also consider the same under the most difficult circumstances that may affect a congregation. For example, if a “local” minister becomes “disgruntled” (either doctrinally or administratively), does he have the “right” to use church as a forum for his dissatisfaction? Similarly, if a minister resigns or loses his credentials for cause, what is his responsibility to those he has served (the “flock”) and to his brothers in the ministry, including the ones who appointed him (the Ministerial Council)?

It is futile to try and catalogue all the future circumstances that can lead a minister to compromise his ethical responsibilities. What we can do is offer some guidelines which apply to situations experienced in local congregations and the brotherhood of the ministry.

Guidelines for the minister to the local congregation:

- The privilege of preaching should not become a forum for negative remarks directed at our membership, leadership, or church. Ministers, and for that matter, any one who speaks to the congregation, should not “get political.” Ministering (preaching, teaching, and leading) should never be used as a platform to advance one political party over another.
- If a minister resigns or loses his credentials and wants to address the local church, he can do so only with agreement from the Ministerial Council. Most likely a member of the Council will be present to lend his support to the minister and the congregation.
- Members of the local church should do everything within their power to ensure that Sabbath services remain a sanctuary for worship, not a battleground for airing personal grievances or

doctrinal debate.

- When a minister (or members) of a local congregation choose to discontinue their association with the CGI, these steps should be followed to minimize confusion within the membership. (Once a minister or leader jeopardizes his role as a CGI representative, he forfeits his privilege to lead those remaining in fellowship with the CGI.)
 - 1) Notify the regional director and home office of events taking place.
 - 2) Every effort should be made to preserve the privilege of worship.
 - 3) In the event members (or the entire congregation) disassociate from the CGI, the assets (as discussed on page 13) of the group remain with the CGI.
 - 4) It is important for members of the CGI to know that the Ministerial Council is available to help in the unlikely event that a congregation faces the loss of its minister or leadership. All members should feel free to contact the home office or their regional director to express their concerns.

Guidelines for grievances between ministers:

- First of all, those involved should literally talk to each other privately. Defaulting to e-mails, texting, or letters, although sometimes helpful, are no replacement for face-to-face communication. It is unreasonable to expect all ministers to think and act exactly alike, but they can be expected to act reasonable toward each other as an example to the congregation. A minister should never resort to lobbying members of the church to create support for him against a fellow minister.
- If sharp division or lack of trust lingers between the affected ministers, an appeal for help or mediation should be made to their regional director. If the regional director is one of the ministers involved in the breach of confidence or grievance, then the appeal should go to the Ministerial Council. (Implicit with the acceptance of CGI credentials is a voluntary willingness to accept the judgment of one’s fellow ministers and, when necessary, the judgment of the Ministerial Council. The code of conduct for the ministry is outlined in the *Ministerial Handbook*.)

- The Ministerial Council will provide a venue for the issues to be heard and evaluated. This may be accomplished via the appointment of their number (a minimum of two) to counsel with those involved or through an invitation to visit with the entire council.

The Speaking Credential

“For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers...whose vain mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not...” (Titus 1:10–11).

Since its inception, the CGI ministry has been careful to watch over the pulpits of its fellowship groups and chartered churches. It seems there is no end to those who appropriate to themselves the “right to speak,” often denigrating the dignity reserved for worship services. For this reason, as well as for the sake of continuity, the Ministerial Council has determined that only those men with CGI speaking credential be allowed to speak before congregations of the CGI (unless a minister is present).

The recommendations that follow are not given to place roadblocks in anyone’s way, but to protect our members who are sometimes victimized by would-be preachers. Unfortunately the privilege of speaking has been used (abused!) for other purposes than those alluded to in 1 Timothy—to inspire, rebuke, exhort, etc.

A speaking credential may be recommended and granted to qualified men only by credentialed ministers of the CGI. (The recommending minister must be prepared to *accept full responsibility* for those men he recommends for speaking credentials.) The home office will automatically issue the credential upon ministerial recommendation unless there is some overriding consideration. The credential will *expire annually* (during the last month of each year) unless there is an application for renewal initiated by the recommending minister. The application for renewal is available from the home office where a record of the credentialed speakers is maintained. The Ministerial Council reserves the right to withdraw this credential at any time at its discretion.

A mere aptitude for speaking and knowledge of the Bible, while of paramount importance, is *not enough* to receive a speaking credential. For a man to receive CGI speaking credentials his life should follow the pattern of qualifications for ministers and deacons as set forth

in 1 Timothy 3. In addition to this, they should also meet the qualifications for a council member as stated elsewhere in this manual.

Worship in Music

The liturgy of a church, which often includes songs and music, form a basis for “public” worship. The various songs that are sung and the type of music performed represent an expression of praise. Since public worship implies collective praise to God in the company of like-minded believers, what is sung and played should, at the very least, *be edifying and uplifting to those involved*.

Music—hymns, vocals, choirs, instrumentals—is an important part of our worship. Some church hymns and music have stood the test of time (generations!) and continue to have emotional relevance to our members. But what about singing or performing newer, less traditional music?

Music is always changing. It seems each generation has its “own” music as it is exposed to a new genre of songs and lyrics and new ways to perform “old” songs. Not all of this is good...but some of it is. The CGI is sensitive and open-minded to new possibilities, so long as the “new” compliments the essential requirements for worship (see below). Within our membership, there are those who prefer a more formal and classical music discipline, while others have a more informal and contemporary musical preference. These preferences can (but shouldn’t!) lead to conflict. If we follow a few simple principles we can minimize the differences we bring to our public worship. Since music is such an important part of our church services, let’s consider these guidelines.

We should all feel free to pursue our musical preferences as individuals in our *private* worship. But we should abide by a more moderate approach to our *collective* worship, guarding against extremes. Whether one’s preference leans in the direction of the more contemporary/praise-worship music or to the more traditional hymnal/classical “sacred” music, those in fellowship should cheerfully support the church’s liturgy even if it does not exactly match one’s personal preference.

In respect to the music “culture” that’s emerged in the CGI, the home office has produced a songbook that can be used in local services. This songbook is made up of various types of songs that are

generally accepted among our brethren. These songs are *not the final word* on what can or cannot be sung, but they do represent a moderate approach to an acceptable style of music. With the cooperation of the local congregation (and the support of the minister) a worship leader may elect to sing songs not included in the “official” song-book. However, for the sake of edification, the music performed and sung during a worship service should complement the CGI culture. When questions arise about what is or is not recommended, the ministry should be consulted.

Our worship in music should be dignified, thoughtful, edifying to the listener, and glorifying to our Creator. Knowing that personal preferences will vary from member to member, we ask that congregations embrace a liturgy that promotes unity and inspiration. As it is in all areas of fellowship, a willingness to serve each other should lead each member to be more cooperative than strong-willed. It’s a fact, that not all “church music” is acceptable in our worship. Some songs carry a wrong message or misrepresent the doctrines of the church and/or the understanding we have of God and Jesus Christ. Because there are so many songs available for a worship service, a song leader should be able to find a plethora of selections that fit within the CGI cultural and doctrinal example. Every effort should be exerted to create a liturgy that is similar from congregation to congregation. Members who visit various CGI congregations should experience a commonality to their worship rather than an exposure to extremes.

The Apostle Paul’s instruction for songs and singing are as relevant today as they were in the first century. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 he instructed, “How is it then, brethren? When you come together, everyone of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” If there is a question about what is or is not edifying, those involved are encouraged to trust the judgment and guidance from those in the ministry.

Sabbath School

Conducting classes for children (including teens) on the Sabbath is a function of the local congregation. Those who serve as instructors should be gifted to teach, exhibiting good skills toward children. Coordinating the Sabbath school class with the church service is left

to the wisdom of those involved—parents, teachers, and pastor. The example many already follow in the CGI is to have the children participate in the first part of the adult service. This allows them to be with their family as formal worship begins. There’s something to be said about having the children participate in the song service, hearing the announcements and prayer requests, and enjoying special music or church programs. Following the introductory liturgy, children are then dismissed to their own private room for Sabbath class. They return to the formal worship for the closing song and prayer.

The instructional material used for Sabbath classes is a decision that rests with the local pastor and those who teach. Depending upon the ages of the children, the teacher will seek to meet the children’s individual needs. The teachers should strive to provide a variety of lessons, some with a focus on memorizing or learning Bible stories and others that involve the children in discussions or appropriate activities such as puzzles, crafts, or coloring sheets. With so many good teaching resources available for churches today, teachers should have no difficulty in finding suitable material for their classes. The lessons, activities, or workshops for the Sabbath school class are left to the inspiration of those who teach.

Teen and Young Adult Programs

The size of the CGI allows for a variety of programs to involve “young people.” What’s done is left to the resources (number of young people, qualified leaders, etc.) available in local congregations and to the programs coordinated through the home office. Local congregations do involve their young people in such activities as community projects, church camps, speech clubs, fundraising, and serving the local congregation.

To coordinate activities and develop opportunities for all CGI young people, the home office has made available a specific “Infuse” program. The program is led by qualified volunteers who rely on the ministry for oversight. The Infuse mission is to teach biblical principles and help young adults establish and maintain their relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. It also seeks to empower the youth to share the gospel and meet the daily challenges of life. Infuse serves two age groups: 1) young adults, ages 18–30 and 2) teens, ages 13–18. Infuse also involves older adults who help support the program.

Presently the program consists of five components.

- Infuse at the Feast
- Annual Retreat
- Website
- Magazine
- Monthly Correspondence
- Facebook/Twitter (social networking)

The Infuse program provides young adults/teens with a service at selected feast sites each year. The program at the Feast consists of Infuse services, usually six of the eight days of the festival. Young adults/teens get involved by providing messages, music, and prayers during morning services prior to the main church service. The youth also help by taking leadership roles in planning Feast activities for the entire church. Usually one of these activities is an annual volunteer activity with a local volunteer organization. Other events that have been led by Infuse at the Feast include a woman's Bible study/luncheon, an Infuse luncheon, an Infuse dinner, softball games, and volleyball tournaments. The experience that the youth gain in helping with the Feast leads some of them to become young leaders in our church.

Annually, Infuse has a weekend retreat which focuses on a particular theme. This also provides a venue for discussing the year's accomplishments, future goals and objectives, and short-term programs. The retreat begins on a Friday evening with dinner and a topic for discussion along with an ice-breaker. On Sabbath the participants have morning seminar sessions followed by Sabbath services, a pot-luck meal, and afternoon seminars. The day is topped off with an evening activity. Sunday usually involves a meeting or seminar on Infuse. The retreat offers an opportunity for the young people to see friends from previous get-togethers while getting acquainted with some who are new to the church.

The Infuse website is another location that young people/adults can use to connect and learn from each other. The quarterly *Infuse* magazine is offered on the website, as well as Bible studies and other learning tools, including videos. Also, the website is the location for getting up-to-date on Infuse plans for the coming months. Some of our young people are also involved in placing content and maintaining the website.

The *Infuse* magazine offers our youth and young adults in the church an opportunity to write articles that can impact our readership. Many of our young people and adults have written articles for the magazine. The opportunity to write articles for the magazine is open to anyone in the church. The young adults are also in charge of getting the magazine edited, planned, and laid out for printing.

Finally, we communicate with our Infuse-age youth on a monthly basis with an Infuse note from the ministerial coordinator overseeing the program. This provides an opportunity for our Infuse elder to connect with the youth on a regular basis and keep them aware of any developments and/or upcoming activities in the program.

As we move into the future, Infuse will be able to adjust to the changing needs of the youth/young adults involved in the program. An emphasis has and will be placed on expanding the number of feast sites where our young people can serve. We will also continue to "build bridges" and seek fellowship with other youth groups in the Church of God movement.

Conflicts Among Members

Inevitably, members in fellowship will have conflicts and disagreements. More often than not these are of little consequence and are resolved through brotherly love. However, there are those more serious "infractions" where one member actually trespasses against another. It's these types of infractions that if left unresolved can be so disruptive to member relationships and cooperation. They should be acknowledged and worked through with the goal of reconciliation. Where there is a will (and there should be), then there is a way. The "way" is outlined in Scripture and requires some give and take on the part of everyone involved.

The primary guidance for resolving member disagreements and conflicts is described in Matthew 18. A cursory reading of this chapter begins with establishing the demeanor members should have toward each other regardless of the seriousness of the disagreement or offense. They are instructed to approach each other harmlessly and in humility, without revenge, as they work toward reconciliation.

Before doing anything else the offended person should prayerfully go to God and see if he or she is led to forgiveness and understanding. If someone doesn't know he has committed a trespass, it is possible that

the offended party can find it within themselves to forgive the trespasser without having to actually confront the person. Sometimes they can, sometimes they can't. If they can, they have no reason to take their concern beyond their private prayers. However, *if their prayers do not bring relief*, then they should talk directly to the person first.

Matthew 18:15 describes someone who has been “trespassed against by a brother,” signifying something more serious than an unimportant difference of opinion or hurt feelings. And Jesus’ illustration doesn’t say if the trespass was done intentionally or not. The point is this; the one who feels trespassed against needs to initially talk privately to the person who they believe has faulted him/her with the intent to clarify the offense. This should be done in humility, seeking to salvage the relationship and not remain at odds. If there is no closure after personally talking to each other—“he doesn’t hear you”—then witnesses can become involved.

Who are these witnesses? Although the Bible doesn’t say, it’s sensible to believe they would be men and/or women capable of objectivity and impartiality. It’s reasonable to see these witnesses as deacons and leading members of the congregation. Their involvement presupposes a judgment will be rendered as to the validity of the trespass. Implied is the expectation that the trespasser will hear them and accept their judgment. If he doesn’t then the matter can be brought before “the church.”

What does “telling it to the church” mean? Some churches take this as permission to have a “tell-all” session before the assembled membership. This usually involves a confession of some sort, and often includes sordid and lurid details. Unfortunately, more often than not, a public airing of members’ offenses or grievances ends with the reputation of those involved (including the innocent) being stained and exposes the listening audience to information that can be more effectively addressed in private. There is no evidence Jesus had that in mind when He said, “Tell it to the church.”

A thoughtful study of Matthew 18 reveals the extent to which the Body of Christ (collectively and individually) would work to gain a brother. These various steps (including “telling it to the church”) do not represent a literal “letter of the law procedure” for resolving offenses. They do serve as guidelines or a template for using every reliable resource to promote a loving relationship among church members.

(Paul’s example of dealing with a “trespasser”—sinner in 1 Corinthians 5—demonstrates the freedom within church leadership to step in and do what’s best for the congregation. Paul’s procedure varies from the preciseness of Matthew 18, but has elements of the template, as does his public confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11–16.) In addition, with society as litigious as it is, our congregations are encouraged to insist that public church meetings serve solely as a sanctuary for fellowship rather than a battlefield for conflict resolution. The opportunity for worship should never be reduced to a venue for church confessions, personal attacks, or character defamation.

First and foremost, Matthew encourages reconciliation if at all possible. If, however, members have prayerfully tried to work out their grievances and yet feel the matter(s) remain unresolved, they are then encouraged to counsel with their local minister or minister of record. If the local minister is in some way involved in the “offense,” reconciliation can be pursued through the Ministerial Council.

Disagreements Over Church Policy or Doctrine

When differences of opinion arise over the interpretation of a church policy, and all concerned have been unable to resolve the issue locally, the matter should be taken to those with ministerial oversight of the congregation. If they are unable to settle the dispute or disagreement, then the Ministerial Council should be approached for advice or a ruling.

Both in the Old Testament and in the New, a ministry is available to resolve matters of controversy. Even if the controversy is with a minister, the rest of the ministry can help sort out the problem. Don’t let hurt feelings, misunderstandings, differences of opinion, or stubborn pride divide the church for which Christ died. Follow the biblical admonition to go to your brother alone. Then take witnesses. Then, if you must, you take it to the church by involving the ministry or Ministerial Council. A church’s stability can be severely affected if squabbles and offences are left unresolved.

Territory

Neither the granting of a charter nor the recognition of a fellowship group should be construed as an exclusive right to a territory. To grant such rights would be contrary to the principles of liberty and

freedom of association upon which the CGI was founded. It is entirely possible that there will be more than one chartered church or fellowship group in a community.

In answer to the obvious question about referrals, the CGI will treat each referral as an individual and will always do what is deemed to be in the best interest of the individual.

As the church grows, various families and individuals come to express an interest in fellowship. It is natural for them to eventually inquire about local church services. Most inquiries will come to the home office through letters, phone calls, and e-mails, or they may ask a “local” member or minister. We respond to their question by referring them to the church or fellowship group geographically closest to their home address. We assume, when they make a “local” inquiry through someone in their area, the same policy is followed.

This policy is not intended to imply that our members “have to” attend only the congregation we recommend. Member fellowship is not based upon territorial concerns. If a family, for reasons that may only be known to them (time of services, available youth program, local choir, etc.), chooses to attend with a group other than the one closest to them, their freedom to worship accordingly is not restricted by a “territorial” policy.

Disfellowshipment

The disfellowship of any bona fide member of the Church of God International is considered to be the result of specifically outlined sins, false teachings, seditions, or heresies contained in Scripture. It is considered a “last resort” when all other scriptural injunctions have failed in attempting to convict an errant member of his/her erroneous ways. The act of barring someone from fellowship is done in the hope that such a person or persons will repent of their sinful attitudes.

On the rare occasion when it is necessary for a pastor to disfellowship or to bar a person from services, the minister must be able to reinforce his actions with the support of the Ministerial Council. The person who has been disfellowshipped has the right of appeal to the council, and should be given a written copy of the charges that have been made against him. A pastor who disfellowships a person may inform other pastors of his actions and the reasons for them. A disfellowshipped person can be welcomed back in fellowship so long as he

has been reconciled to the congregation from which he was disfellowshipped.

Exceptions

This manual cannot specifically anticipate every possible need or circumstance that comes with establishing a church and serving members. However, it does put forth a minimum standard of consistency for field churches. When exceptions arise, they should be pursued in a spirit of cooperation and for purposes of obvious benefit to the mission of the church. It is expected that exceptions to these guidelines will be a consequence of being led by God’s Spirit to meet the dynamic needs of the church’s members and any legal requirements that may become binding on the corporate organization.

Those who turn to the Church of God International will soon learn about servant-leadership—the mandate to serve each other as Christ served the church. His example compels us to work with each other out of consideration and courtesy toward advancing the gospel. This manual is presented to facilitate cooperation among brethren who share a desire to be part of something greater than individual effort.



For Further Information

If you would like to visit a CGI congregation, or if you would simply like to speak with a CGI minister or representative with any questions you may have, feel free to write or call us. We will be delighted to serve you in any way possible.

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Thank you for the opportunity to serve you!

About the Church of God International

This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

- 1. Personal and local church evangelism.*
- 2. Television and radio broadcasting.*
- 3. Booklets, brochures, and study tapes.*
- 4. The Internet.*

How You Can Help

All our materials and services are offered to the public free of charge. Many naturally ask us how we can afford to send out thousands of booklets and study tapes each month. The answer is simple.

On a regular basis, prayerful friends and members of the Church of God International voluntarily support us with tithes and offerings to further the advancement of the gospel to the world. No financial obligation is ever demanded, but if you are moved to support this work of God, donations are gratefully accepted at the addresses listed. (Contributions in the United States and Canada are tax deductible.) Giving to and through us is an effective way for people like you to help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.