

# **CHURCH OF GOD**

## **FURTHER STUDY**

### **Report:**

### **Meaning and Usage of the Term “Bishop”**

**Presented to the International General Council  
77th International General Assembly**

This “Further Study” attempts to objectively address the defined tasks with reference to historical perspective, biblical references, and cultural influence providing considered options and recommendation for moving forward.

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# **FURTHER STUDY**

## **Report: Meaning and Usage of the Term “Bishop”**

**PRESENTED TO THE INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL**

### **MOTION:**

#### **76TH INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL/ASSEMBLY, 2016**

*After a detailed review by the International Executive Council of the meaning and usage of the term “bishop,” further study needs to be done that will better address whether it is necessary to change the current nomenclature in order to clarify and fulfill the intent of the International General Council with respect to the designation of the ministerial rank in the Church of God. We also recommend that the study include a detailed look at the title of “Ordained Bishop” and any effect it has on the legal and cultural issues of the international church and on the IRS (USA, Internal Revenue Service) rulings concerning the national church. Further, that the following issues and relatedness of these issues be part of this report:*

- 1. Titles for all Ranks of Ministry*
- 2. Qualifications of Ministry*
- 3. Women in Ministry*

*That this study be brought back to the 2018 International General Council.*

## Tasks

At the 76<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, the International General Council received a report regarding the “Meaning and Usage of the Term “Bishop.” Following presentation of the report, the motion was carried. The motion called for continuance of study for the aforementioned motion and that it be brought back to the 2018 International General Council. The specific tasks of the motion include the following:

1. Better address whether it is necessary to change the current nomenclature in order to clarify and fulfill the intent of the International General Council with respect to the designation of the ministerial rank (“bishop”) in the Church of God.
2. A detailed look at the title of “Ordained Bishop” and any effect it has on the legal and cultural issues of the international church and on the IRS (USA, Internal Revenue Service) rulings concerning the national church (USA).
3. That the following issues and relatedness of these issues be part of this report:
  - Titles for all Ranks of Ministry
  - Qualifications of Ministry
  - Women in Ministry

This “Further Study” attempts to objectively address the defined tasks with reference to historical perspective, biblical references, and cultural influence providing considered options and recommendation for moving forward.

## MEANING AND USAGE OF THE TERM “BISHOP”:

### HISTORICAL ANTECEDENCE

A review of the historical usage of the term “bishop” in the Church of God can provide clarity of how, why, and when it has been utilized, as well as, the development of ministerial ranking. The motion does not call for a theological discourse of the meaning “ordained bishop.” It does call for better understanding of the possible change of nomenclature.

According to the dissertation (1997) of Dr. David G. Roebuck, *LIMITING LIBERTY: THE CHURCH OF GOD AND WOMEN MINISTRIES, 1886–1996*, Dr. Roebuck, director of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, states in “Brief History of Church of God Clergy,” page 16,

“As Baptists, the Christian Union recognized Richard Spurling as an ordained elder and his son R.G. Spurling as a licensed minister. The month after its organization, R.G. Spurling was ordained and selected as pastor.”

Roebuck further states,

“It appears that the titles “bishop” and “elder” were used interchangeably—with “bishop” most often referring to an ordained pastor and “elder” most often referring to an ordained minister who was not serving as a pastor. It is also probable that the Christian Union ordained deacons. Then in 1909, the Church of God agreed to grant evangelist licenses to some who were not yet eligible for ordination. These included men and women. Thus, by 1909 the denomination recognized three ministerial offices: bishop or elder, deacon, and evangelist.”

According to the *Book of Minutes, A Compiled History of the Work of the General Assemblies of the Church of God, 1922, Brief History, page 9,*

“After having joined themselves together under the above obligation (willing to set together as the Church of God) they decided to name the baby organization Christian Union. They then decided to receive persons into membership who were possessed with a good Christian character, and that ordained and licensed ministers from other churches could retain their same position or office without being reordained.

“By virtue of the office he had held as a faithful ordained minister in the Missionary Baptist church for a number of years, Elder Richard Spurling was duly acknowledged and recognized as their minister, to do all the business devolved on him as such in the new order. He then having been placed in authority by the body, took his seat as moderator and by prayer dedicated the infant church to God...

“An invitation was then given for the reception of members, and they received Richard G. Spurling, who was then a licensed minister. The church chose him as their pastor, and had him ordained the next month, September 26, 1886.”

The Second Annual Assembly was held at Union Grove, Bradley Co., TN, January 9–13, 1907. It was at this Assembly the church was named Church of God. Further, at this Assembly, the question of ordaining Alex Hamby was discussed and “the decision was to ordain him as a *bishop* in the Church of God.” During the early years of the church, bishops, deacons, and evangelists could set churches in order and were under the direction of an overseer acting in his state.

The Seventh Annual Assembly was held in Cleveland, Tennessee, January 9–14, 1912. It was the practice that time be devoted for the propagation of questions and answers. One of the questions and the answer are listed below:

*Question. Should not a pastor in the Church of God be as blameless as a bishop?*

*Ans. Bishops are to be the pastors. If for any reason any other person should act as a pastor his life should be very pure and upright. 1 Tim. 4:12.*

At the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 1925, the Church of God created the order of ministry known as “exhorter,” initially established as a lay office, eventually becoming an apprentice level for all credentialed ministers.

In 1948, the Church of God modified its ministerial offices or ranks when the title “bishop” changed to “ordained minister”; evangelist changed to “licensed minister”; and “deacon” eliminated. According to the *Supplement to the Minutes of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly*, pages 196–197,

“That the title of ‘ordained bishop’ be changed to ‘ordained minister,’ which shall be comparable to the present rank of bishop in that the ordained ministers shall comprise the voting ranks of the General Council, formerly known as the Bishops’ Council” (42<sup>nd</sup> A., p. 27).

Women continued to be identified as “lady evangelist” until 1990 when the General Assembly abolished “lady evangelist” providing women the same title and responsibilities as “licensed minister” except for ordination. And in 1964, the Church of God established the specialized offices of minister of music and minister of Christian education (50<sup>th</sup> A., 1964, p. 55, par. 5-10.)

In *Church of God Polity*, page 185, Dr. R. Hollis Gause, author, states, “The Ordained Minister: This is the most authoritative rank of the ministry of the Church of God. It agrees to the older designation of “Bishop.”

The 65<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1994) passed the following item regarding ministerial credentialing identifying the following:

**International Ministerial Credentialing**

*All ministers duly ordained in the Church of God by a given national office may also receive an ordination credential from the International Offices of the Church of God, provided they apply through their respective area superintendents.*

**The 68<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, 2000**

At the 68<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly in 2000, the General Assembly passed the following measure:

Item 7. Ministerial Certification, Minutes of the 68<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, pages 80-81, *For some time the church has recognized the need for a change in ministerial designations. With the growth of the church as an international body, the need for a review of the designations of the ministerial ranks has become increasingly important. In many instances the designation “ordained” must be a part of the ministerial credential for a pastor to be recognized as an official minister.*

- A. That we amend the Supplement to the *Minutes of the General Assembly*, page 126, **S3. GENERAL COUNCIL**, V. Bylaws, Article 1, Members, by changing the title for the current ordained rank of ministry to ordained bishop.

The measure also amended the title for “licensed minister” to “ordained minister.” Item D. amended the Rights and Authorities by adding the following:

State/Territorial Overseers  
(or international equivalency)  
*Administrative Bishop*

International Executive Committee members  
*Executive Bishop*

General Overseer  
*Presiding Bishop*

Further, the following statement of the Minutes should be noted:

*For many years the church employed the term bishop for the ministerial rank now known as ordained minister. But this was changed, and the term bishop was dropped for all official denominational usage. However, as a Biblically centralized body, the church has positions of responsibility which may be more accurately designated by the title bishop.*

In addition, the 2000 International General Assembly passed that the bylaws of the International General Council and General Assembly be unified “into one document and refer to them as the Bylaws of the Church of God.” This significant decision meant that the designation of title “ordained bishop” became a part of the bylaws and thereby under the governance and polity as prescribed by the Bylaws of the Church of God. Currently, the title “ordained bishop” is articulated under ARTICLE VI, Governing Bodies, 2. INTERNATIONAL GENERAL COUNCIL, Members, (*Minutes of the 76<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly*, page 59),

*The International General Council is composed of all **ordained bishops** of the Church of God, who shall comprise its voting constituency.*

Other actions regarding either ministerial ranking or titles included the following:

1. S59 (*Minutes*, 1998, p. 210). FEMALE MINISTER  
This item modified previous designation as stated:  
*Female ministers are to use the same ministerial titles as males with all the requirements, duties, responsibilities, and ministry opportunities of male ministers who hold either the first or second level of ministerial credentials as presently set forth in the Minutes of the General Assembly.*
2. The title of CHURCH CLERK was amended to CHURCH TREASURER.

The 2000 International General Assembly marked a significant modification of ministerial ranking in the Church of God. Of the three major ministerial ranks, two were changed from “licensed minister” to “ordained minister” and “ordained minister” became “ordained bishop.” According to the *Minutes*, the usage of “bishop” was actively reclaimed to Church of God polity, because “the church has positions of responsibility which may be more accurately designated by the title *bishop*.”

As time progressed post 2000, comprehensive discussion focused upon the usage of “bishop” both Biblically and culturally. While the 2000 General Assembly modified the titles adding “bishop,” the General Assembly did not call for adaptation of the title with the exclusion of the previous title “overseer.” As a result, ministerial ranking and some positions have been referred to as either “administrative bishop” or “state overseer.” In addition, the highest elected position is identified as either “general overseer” and in some smaller venues “presiding bishop.” It appears almost no one alludes to assistant general overseers as “executive bishops.”

Following 2000, the pervasive discussion of the term “bishop” pushed for a definitive narrative of the meaning and usage.

### **The 70<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, 2004**

A motion was presented to the 2004 International General Assembly to study the meaning and usage of the term “ordained bishop.”

The 70<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly passed a measure identified as **15. Ordained Bishop** which called for the following:

*That a study be conducted and theological papers prepared, defining the meaning and usage of the title Ordained Bishop; in order to clarify the intent of the Executive Council with respect to nomenclature for ministerial rank in the Church of God. Further, that said study be brought back to the 2006 International General Assembly and that the results of such study be included in the Minutes of the International General Assembly of the Church of God.*

## **The 71<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, 2006**

Following the direction of the 2004 International General Assembly, a study was conducted and a delineation of the meaning and usage of the term “bishop” was prepared for presentation to the 2006 General Assembly. In July 2006, a motion was presented to the International General Council for inclusion in the *Minutes*, S57. ORDAINED BISHOP, section I. The Meaning and Usage of the Term *Bishop*. This narrative provided three sections: A. Biblical Understanding of Ordination, B. New Testament Designation of Church Ministries and Offices, and C. Use of the Title *Bishop*.

The narrative was approved by the International General Assembly and remains in the current 2016 *Minutes*.

## **The 75<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, 2014**

The 75<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly adopted the following measure:

That we amend S56. ORDAINED BISHOP. I. MEANING AND USAGE OF THE TERM BISHOP, section A, Biblical Understanding of Ordination, by adding the following as paragraph 8:

*That a study be done and a theological paper prepared defining the meaning and usage of the title Ordained Bishop; and should it be necessary change the current nomenclature in order to clarify and fulfill the intent of the International General Council with respect to designation of ministerial rank in the Church of God.*

*Further, that said study be brought back to the 2016 International General Assembly and that the results of such study be included in the Minutes of the International General Assembly of the Church of God.*

## **The 76<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly, 2016**

In response to the 75<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly call for a study in paragraph 8 of S56. ORDAINED BISHOP, I. MEANING AND USAGE OF THE TERM BISHOP, the International Executive Committee called for the Doctrine and Polity Committee to prepare said report. The report was presented January 2015 to the Executive Council. It included three sections:

1. **Principles**—A theological interpretation of the term “bishop” in the New Testament and guiding principles. Synoptically, the principles state that the polity of the New Testament as developed during the first two centuries was complicated by internal and external challenges; secondly, the task to define “interpretation of the term” is complicated by twenty-one centuries of development and adaptation; thirdly, there is a challenge to develop nomenclature which is harmonious with the Bible but relevant to our current needs; and finally, consideration be given to limiting the title “Bishop” to certain specific areas of service to achieve greater clarity.

2. **Retrospect**—A brief review of New Testament usage and development of the term “Bishop” is stated. The report expounds, “Although the administrative element was maintained in its New Testament setting, its character (the term “Bishop”) came to a focus in accountable, spiritual and physical care, and oversight of the flock.” Generally, the report enounces, “there would seem to be some flexibility in the titling of contemporary offices, as long as the Biblical vital ministries and gifts are maintained in the body of Christ.”
3. **Conclusions**—The report provides generalized conclusions regarding the term “bishop.” It asserts, “bishop” is a functional term for one who provides accountable caring oversight; bishops often emerged out of the elders; the authoritative role of the bishop emerged quickly, due to internal heresies and extreme external persecutions; “offices” came to focus around the daily spiritual and physical care of the flock; and the term “bishop” has a fluidity similar to that encountered when deciding which polity is Biblical—congregational, Presbyterian, or episcopal.

This report was presented to the 2016 International General Council. The International General Council called for further study to better address whether it is necessary to change the current nomenclature of “bishop.” A Research Committee on Ministerial Rank was appointed and returned a report generalizing rationale for the designation of “Ordained Bishop.” The report articulated possible reasons for consideration of any change to the title, “Ordained Bishop,” with other items that could be considered in the future.

## **Use of the Term *Bishop* in Variant Denominations**

A review of the use of *bishop* in variant denominations can provide a clear understanding that its use is delineated and actualized in diverse ways, usually based upon their distinctive cultural tradition and/or the organization’s varied Scriptural interpretation.

### **Church of God**

In the polity of the Church of God, the international leader is the Presiding Bishop (General Overseer), and the members of the Executive Committee are Executive Bishops (Assistant General Overseers and Secretary General). Collectively, they supervise and appoint national and state leaders around the world. Leaders of individual states/regions are Administrative Bishops who have jurisdiction over local churches in their respective area and are vested with authority for appointment of local pastors. All ministers are credentialed at one of three levels with the most senior rank of ordained bishop. To be eligible to serve in any executive position of authority, a minister must hold the rank of ordained bishop.

### **Church of God of Prophecy**

The Church of God of Prophecy acknowledges several ranks of ministry including lay minister's certification, licensed minister, deacon/deaconess, elder, and bishop. Each of these positions is eligible for ordination with specific guidelines. Regarding the title "bishop," note the following quote from *Ministry Policy Manual, Church of God of Prophecy*, page 101, "A bishop is one of the eldership offices that provides oversight leadership to the church. A bishop could function as a general appointee, national/regional/state overseer, district overseer, an evangelist, or as a pastor. Bishops serve either on local or translocal levels."

### **Pentecostal Church of God**

The general convention of the Pentecostal Church of God changed the title of their General Superintendent to Bishop in 2002. The title Bishop is used for both general and district-level leaders.

### **International Pentecostal Holiness Church**

Pentecostal Holiness congregations are self-governing in local affairs and are led by pastors. The pastor administers the ordinances and promotes the spiritual welfare of the congregants. Other than the pastor, the church board consists of deacons and a secretary/treasurer elected by the church members. Churches are organized into conferences led by conference superintendents. In their spiritual roles, superintendents function as bishops. In the IPHC, the terms "bishop" and "superintendent" are used interchangeably. The church recognizes the biblical office of bishop but does not believe in an historical episcopate or adhere to the doctrine of apostolic succession. The chief leadership is the General Superintendent and/or Presiding Bishop.

### **Church of God in Christ**

Their ecclesiastical structure is composed of large areas called "jurisdictions" within the COGIC with each under the authority of a Bishop. They have the authority to appoint and ordain local pastors, elders, ministers, and reverends.

### **Assemblies of God**

The Assemblies of God recognizes three classifications of ministers: certified, licensed, and ordained. District councils examine candidates for all levels of ministry and recommend those qualified to the Executive Presbyter (General Council's Credentials Committee) which has authority to issue ministerial credentials. The Assemblies also recognize a local church credential, which can be issued by a General Council affiliated church for those engaged only in local ministry.

### **Church of the Nazarene**

The Church of the Nazarene has two orders of ordained ministry: the ordained elder and the ordained deacon. The ordained elder is a person, either male or female, who has been set apart for a ministry of “Word and Sacrament.” Their primary assignment is to preach, administer sacraments, and lead the local church. The ordained deacon is a man or woman set apart for full-time ministry in specialized areas of ministry. The church also has district licensed ministers who are persons on the path toward ordination. A licensed minister may, in some cases, be a pastor.

### **Baptist Churches**

During the past fifteen years, some Baptist churches have elevated pastors to bishops citing biblical precedence and their ministers’ influential leadership. Generally, Baptists recognize only two scriptural offices: pastor-teacher and deacon.

### **The Episcopal Church**

The Episcopal Church is governed according to episcopal polity, a hierarchical form of church governance in which the chief local authorities are called bishops. The church elects a Presiding Bishop, chief pastor and primate (bishop) of the church. The church is organized into dioceses led by bishops in consultation with representative bodies. At the local level, each congregation elects a vestry or bishop’s committee. The vestry of each parish (a church territorial entity) elects a priest, called a rector, who has spiritual jurisdiction in the parish and selects assistant clergy, both deacons and priests. There is a much more involved hierarchy of bishops and clergy titles in The Episcopal Church polity.

### **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the term bishop is an expressive name for a Minister of Word and Sacrament who serves a congregation and exercises oversight of the flock of Christ.

### **United Methodist Church**

In the UMC, bishops serve as administrative and pastoral superintendents of the church. They are elected for life from among the ordained elders (presbyters) by vote of the delegates in regional conferences. Only bishops are empowered to consecrate bishops and ordain clergy.

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

Bishops are the chief officers of the connectional organization and are elected for life by a majority vote of the General Conference.

### **Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army does not have bishops but has appointed leaders of geographical areas known as Divisional Commanders. Larger areas are called Territories and are led by a Territorial Commander.

## CULTURAL, LEGAL, AND MILITARY CHAPLAINCY ISSUES

The assigned task of this “Further Study” requests a detailed look at the title of “Ordained Bishop” and any effect it has on the legal and cultural issues of the international church and on the IRS (USA, Internal Revenue Service) rulings concerning the national church (USA).

### Cultural

Throughout the years of discussion and study of the meaning and usage of the term “bishop,” there have been actions taken to focus on international and cultural issues. For example, under S21. APPLICANTS FOR MINISTRY, Section VII. International Ministerial Credentialing, the *Minutes* states,

*All ministers duly ordained in the Church of God by a given national office may also receive an ordination credential from the International Offices of the Church of God, provided they apply through their respective area superintendents.*

This provides that ordination opportunities have been granted to given national offices provided they apply through their respective area superintendents.

Further, not much attention is given to Item C. Use of the Title Bishop, under S22. ORDAINED BISHOP, I. The Meaning and Usage of the Term *Bishop*.

*We recognize that there may be cultural differences in various countries that would limit the usage of the title bishop. In such cases, countries should be allowed to use the title as appropriate.*

This item clearly recognizes the possibility of cultural differences in various countries that would limit the usage of the title *bishop*. With this understanding, countries have the latitude to use the title as they deem appropriate.

### Legal

Regarding international legal issues, Dennis W. Watkins, Legal Counsel for the Church of God indicates, “I have had no legal issues internationally regarding our use of the term “bishop.” However, from time to time, I have had to explain that our use of the term “bishop” is not synonymous with the use of the term in Methodist, Episcopal, and Catholic churches, where the bishop is a position indicating ecclesiastical supervision over a district, region or diocese.” Watkins is the primary source for any international legal issues affecting the International Offices of the Church of God.

The task further requests information for legal issues related to the Internal Revenue Service of the USA. Dennis Watkins provides detail information of the impact of usage of the term “bishop.”

Watkins states, “Regarding use of the term “bishop” in the Church of God as a title for ministers, based on my experience and understanding, the IRS does not look to the moniker or title of a minister’s position, but rather to the functions of what constitutes a “minister” for tax purposes. Those factors are:

- A. Is the person ordained, commissioned, or licensed?
- B. Can the person administer the sacraments?
- C. Can the person conduct religious worship?
- D. Does the person manage responsibilities in a local church or a parent denomination?
- E. Is the person considered a religious leader by the church or parent denomination?

It is my opinion that in the United States, we can call our ministers by any title that we wish without any ramifications from the IRS, as long as they meet the definitions above.”

### **Military Chaplaincy**

The question of ordination is of considerable importance for Church of God clergy, both men and women, who serve as professionally trained military chaplains. The following detailed information is provided by Dr. Richard L. Pace, Endorser, Church of God Chaplains Commission.

The baseline document is the US Department of Defense Instruction Number 1304.28 (Guidance for the Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Departments). The following quotations come directly from DOD documents. The terminology for a person who can serve as a chaplain is a “Religious Ministry Professional.” The definition of a RMP is:

E2.1.9. Religious Ministry Professional (RMP). An individual endorsed to represent a religious organization and to conduct its religious observances or ceremonies. An RMP is a fully qualified member of the clergy for those religious organizations that have a tradition of professional clergy or their equivalents. The religious organization’s endorsement verifies that an RMP is professionally qualified to serve as a chaplain in the military and meets the graduate education and religious leadership requirements of this instruction.

The Church of God’s responsibility is to make sure COG clergy meet the requirements for service as a chaplain by way of an *Ecclesiastical Endorsement* which is defined as:

E2.1.5. Ecclesiastical Endorsement. Written documentation from a religious organization that complies with the administrative requirements of this instruction that an applicant for the military chaplaincy is fully and professionally qualified and endorsed to perform all offices, functions, sacraments, ordinances, and ceremonies required of an RMP for that religious organization, and is capable and authorized to minister as required within a pluralistic environment.

Depending on how the phrase in the paragraph above “perform all offices” is interpreted, all COG clergy need to be Ordained Bishops or their equivalent to serve as military chaplains since that is the only rank that can “perform all offices” in the COG.

From the Chaplains Commission’s perspective on the qualifications for COG military chaplains, all Church of God clergy who serve as chaplains must be viewed by the military officials and other religious organizations as being equally qualified to perform all religious functions of our church. The terminology for the Church of God uses for ministerial ranks should not imply that our women clergy are in any way less qualified to perform religious functions. Since the most recognized terminology for qualified clergy from Protestant traditions is “Ordained,” it is important for COG Chaplains to have that designation.

The following USA Department of Defense document articulates provisions in the endorsement process requiring both a copy of the COG Certificate of Ecclesiastical Endorsement and the person’s Ordination Certificate.

The Department of Defense, E5. Enclosure 5 FORMAT FOR PROVIDING REQUIRED INFORMATION TO ENDORSE RMPs AS CHAPLAINS TO THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS

E5.1.1.14. Certificate of Ecclesiastical Endorsement; Ordination Certificate.

## **RELATEDNESS: TITLES FOR ALL RANKS OF MINISTRY**

Within the Church of God, there are the following ranks of ministry:

### **Primary Ranks:**

- Ordained Bishop
- Ordained Minister
- Exhorter

### **Other Ranks:**

- Minister of Music
- Minister of Christian Education
- Lay Certification

### **Special Designations:**

- Honorary Certificate
- International Ministerial Credentialing

The primary ranks are addressed in the *Minutes*. The other ranks of minister of music/Christian education are credentials in “highly specialized areas of ministry.” However, these ranks are considered to be equivalent of exhorter’s licensure. Neither of these is eligible for ordination as long as they remain solely in the field of music or Christian education. Should they desire a pulpit ministry, all requirements of current ordained minister and ordained bishop are applicable.

Special designations of Honorary and International Ministerial Credentialing do not articulate any detail requirements regarding rank. However, applicants must pass the state board examination and receive endorsement by the general overseer. It is assumed that all requirements of ministerial ranks are applicable.

## **Meaning and Usage of Ministerial Rank Titles**

While the Motion empowering this “Further Study” does not call for definition or theological discourse regarding ministry titles, it should be noted that there are a number of titles utilized in the church that are not articulated in Church of God polity. For example, *Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance* does not give definition for a “minister,” “pastor,” “reverend,” “chaplain,” “clergy,” “elder,” and possibly others. However, these titles are used perpetually. Generally, Church of God polity concentrates on function, execution, and governance without statement of definition, meaning, purpose, or roles and responsibilities.

In recent years, the deliberation has primarily been on the meaning and usage of strictly the term “bishop.” The etymology of the word “bishop” is derived via the British Latin and Vulgar Latin term *ebiscopus/biscopus*, from the Greek *episkopus* meaning “overseer.” The traditional use of the term “bishop” in the Church of God has been utilized for a total of fifty-seven years since 1909.

The call for “Further Study” states to “change the current nomenclature in order to clarify and fulfill...intent.” Possibly the greatest outcome of the “Further Study” is to direct attention positively emphasizing the value and importance of all the various ranks, positions, and titles to see the realization of the Mission and Vision of the Church of God.

The *Minutes of the 76<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly*, under the heading “COMMITMENTS TO OUR MISSION AND VISION,” page 36–44, states on page 42 the following:

### **CLERGY**

**A. Priority Statement:** The Church of God believes that from within the priesthood of all believers God specifically selects, calls, anoints, and commissions certain individuals for extraordinary service and leadership and that this special (clergy) calling is of God’s sovereign will, characterized by individuals with spiritual passion, love for the lost, total involvement, lifelong sacrifice, and servant leadership rather than by those seeking position or personal honor.

**B. For Implementation We Recommend:**

1. More emphasis upon local church confirmation, affirmation, and endorsement of ministerial applicants prior to their seeking exhorter’s license (Acts 13:1-4; 14:23).

2. Establishing more specific Scriptural and practical assessment and appraisal procedures for evaluating ministers of all ranks and in all positions on a continuing basis (Romans 12:2; 13:5; 2 Timothy 4:5).
3. Heightened emphasis on continuing education for all ministers through formal institutions and special seminars, study programs, and conventions (2 Timothy 2:15).
4. Recognition of the vital role women presently give in Church of God ministry—their teaching, preaching, administrative and leadership skills—and renewed encouragement and support for their ministry, in keeping with that obvious emphasis found in the Gospels, throughout the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles (Acts 16:14, 15, 40; 18:26; 21:8, 9; Romans 16:1-7; Titus 2:3-5).

In addition, two recommendations (Items 3. and 4.) for implementation related to “bishop” are provided under the “COMMITMENTS TO OUR MISSION AND VISION,” page 43, stating the following:

### **LEADERSHIP**

#### **B. For Implementation We Recommend:**

3. More emphasis on the Scriptural qualifications for bishop (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and greater care in the leadership selection and appointment process.
4. More delegating of secondary matters (Acts 6:3) in order to keep the role of bishop in perspective (Acts 6:4).

These duly passed statements of the General Assembly enunciate Priority Statements and Recommendations that focus upon “clergy,” “vital role of women in ministry,” and “bishop.”

## **QUALIFICATIONS IN MINISTRY**

The task assigned by the International General Council is to further study this specific issue and any relatedness as a result of modification to ministry rank titles. While the *Minutes* articulate various ministry ranks and position titles, the inclusion of qualifications is not always present. The following survey describes the ministry ranks, state/regional-level ministry positions/roles, and international-level ministry positions/roles listed in the *Minutes* and differentiate those that include qualifications:

*(See TABLE 1, next page.)*

**TABLE 1: Review of Listed Qualifications, *Church of God Minutes***

<b><u>Ministry Ranks</u></b>	<b><u>Qualifications Listed</u></b>
Exhorter	Yes
Ordained Minister	Yes
Ordained Bishop	Yes
Minister of Music/Christian Education	Yes
Lay Minister Certification	Yes
Ministerial Intern (MIP)	No
<b><u>State/Regional-Level Ministry Positions/Roles</u></b>	
State Overseer	Yes
State Council	No
State Boards and Committees (Elected and Appointed)	No
State Director of Youth and Discipleship	No
State Assistant Director of Youth and Discipleship	No
District Overseers	No
District Leadership	No
Pastor	No
Members (Qualifications inherent in Membership Charge)	Yes
Church and Pastor’s Council	Yes
Church Treasurer	Yes
Church Finance Committee	Yes
Local Church Leaders (Elders and Deacons)	No
<b><u>International-Level Ministry Positions/Roles</u></b>	
International General Council	No
International Executive Committee (All Members)	No
International Council	No
International Executive Council	No
Standing Boards and Committees	No
Director of World Missions	No
Assistant Director of World Missions	No
All Departmental Leaders	No

The review demonstrates a preponderance of no qualifications enunciated. In most cases, the primary criteria listed is “Selection,” sometimes “Requirements,” and generally throughout Duties and Authorities.” The emphasis appears to be upon the selection process and authorized administrative ministry operation. Qualifications should stress specific variables including the following: Scriptural significance, ministry calling, skill sets (administration, leadership, giftedness, integrity, etc.), servant commitment, spiritual maturity, sufficient training, and experience.

Should there be a change in the current nomenclature, it seems apparent that much attention should be devoted to providing qualifications for all active ministry commissions. Frequently,

individuals are either appointed or elected to a ministry position without consideration of distinctive qualifications.

In addition, there are questions arising that focus upon the credentialing process, including the international dimension. The following recommendation is the product of the joint session (2017) with the International Council and the International Executive Council. It references the credentialing process and the operational paradigm of implementation globally and under consideration by the International Executive Council.

### **General Requirements of Applicants of Ministry**

We recommend:

**That we amend Page 95, S21. APPLICATION FOR MINISTRY, IV. General Requirements of Applicants for Ministry, by adding the following as item 7:**

7. International Exceptions: The following exceptions to the established ministerial credentialing process apply only to countries outside the United State and Canada ~~which are under the direction of World Missions.~~ (International Executive Committee recommends)
  - a. That the first level of credentials be issued by the Field Director's office, upon recommendation of the Regional Superintendent and National Overseer following appropriate screening and testing.
  - b. That the history and polity sections of the examination for the first two ranks of ministry be redesigned to include an abbreviated overview of the history and polity of the Church of God internationally and a more detailed review of the national church history and polity where the examination is administered.
  - c. The Ordained Bishop Examination would remain unchanged.

## **WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

Since the early history of the Church of God, women in ministry have garnered contemplation, discussion, and debate regarding their role and engagement in ministry. A review of Church of God history reveals women believers in the many phases of ministry outreach have demonstrated strong support to growth and development throughout our 130 plus years of existence. A thorough assessment and reflection on the role of women in Church of God ministry is tantamount to "Further Study."

## Historical Perspective

There is clear evidence in the historical record of the Church of God that women participated in the early business of the church.

According to the dissertation (1997) of Dr. David G. Roebuck, *LIMITING LIBERTY: THE CHURCH OF GOD AND WOMEN MINISTRIES, 1886-1996*, Dr. Roebuck, director of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center, states in “INTRODUCTION,” page 1,

At their second annual Assembly in 1907, the congregations that were about to adopt the name Church of God acknowledged that women constituted a majority of their membership... R.G. Spurling reminded the delegates that women were the majority of their charter members.

Although the Church of God opened the door for both lay and clergy women to minister in its early years, it also continually limited the opportunities of those women, as did many other Pentecostal churches.

In Roebuck’s dissertation, he asserts in the section “Excluding Women from Church Government,” pages 78–81,

A.J. Tomlinson was concerned about restoring apostolic church government and it was here that women were excluded from certain ministerial roles. The first annual Assembly reflected this concern about proper government; its first ruling was, “We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only.” Tomlinson contended that Pentecostals should have one doctrine, one organization, and one government because there was only one law-giver, Jesus Christ. Tomlinson then defined the church. His Church means government. It is not a legislative or law-making body. It executes the laws already given. It is also a judicial body, because it applies the laws already enacted to particular cases. This definition of church as government, with the exclusion of women from the government, created a situation in which women were encouraged to preach and allowed to pastor local churches but was prohibited from speaking in business meetings.

### Third Annual Assembly, 1908

According to the *Minutes of the Third Annual Assembly, Jan. 8–12, 1908*, the following was recorded:

*Deaconesses and their duties: Discussed at some length and decided that women who are qualified and feel the call to the work as outlined in Rom. 16:2 in connection with Acts 6:3 which indicates that she is a female Deacon, therefore her work is similar to that of a Deacon, should be appointed by the Church to exercise such qualities as she is gifted with. We further recommend her as the woman mentioned in Titus 2:3-5 which duty she should exercise as directed by the Spirit. Also, she may along with the elder men, take her part of 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

## **Fourth Annual Assembly, 1909**

Further, the *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Assembly, Jan. 6–9, 1909* records the following:

*Female ministers—Deaconesses and Evangelists. This subject was discussed, and decided that female ministers had their place in the Lord's vineyard in the days of the Apostles and must be recognized in these days, but for lack of precept or example in the New Testament for ordination the assembly advises for the present, that the wives of the deacons be considered and appointed deaconesses by virtue of the position and ordination of their husbands. The assembly advises further that the women who engage in the ministry of the Word be acknowledged by the church and supplied with a certificate or license showing date of appointment and by what church. Also, that above certificate or license be conferred to un-ordained male ministers.*

## **1910: A.J. Tomlinson Position**

By 1910, a position developed largely by A.J. Tomlinson that Biblical references to “the church” where women are to remain silent are in fact references to business meetings. Thus, women began to be limited in speech in terms of government, but not in worship services. Tomlinson was willing to allow women to preach, but he would not allow them to speak in a local church conference or in the General Assembly business meeting (Position Papers 2006, pp.15–16).

## **Significant Offices in the Local Church Not Limited by Gender**

There were historically significant offices in the local church that originally were not limited by gender requirements. Those include the following:

- Church Treasurer (Clerk), First Assembly, *1906 Minutes*, p. 13, [Written]; pp.2-3, *1906 Minutes* [Published]).
- Finance Committee, 25<sup>th</sup> Assembly, *1930 Minutes*, p. 21.

## **The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly, 1934**

By 1934, a stipulation was added on the selection of Church and Pastor's Council that the candidate for election, “... shall be loyal male members of the church” (S42. Church and Pastor's Council, *Minutes of the 71<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Church of God, 2006.*)

## **Later Historical Developments**

### **1986–1990: Lady Minister**

It was recommended that the Supplement to the 1984 *General Assembly Minutes*, page 97, LADY MINISTER, be amended as follows:

*That the following paragraph replace the present ruling currently listed in the General Assembly Minutes: That we establish two ranks of female ministry in the Church of God,*

*that of Exhorter and that of Licensed Minister, with all requirements, duties and responsibilities, and ministry opportunities, with the exception of ordination, as presently set forth in the Minutes of the General Assembly.*

(Note: This was on the 1986 General Council Agenda but did not pass the General Council. It was on the 1990 General Council and passed without the clause “with the exception of ordination,” but that clause was added by the General Assembly session in 1990.)

### **1990: General Assembly Membership**

Prior to this date, women were not allowed to participate in the General Assembly membership with full voting rights. The motion at the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly stated:

*We recommend: That all Church of God members present and registered at the General Assembly shall comprise the voting constituency.*

This motion passed the 1990 General Council/General Assembly as “previous notice” for the next Assembly. It passed the General Council in 1990 but did not come to the General Assembly until 1992 when it passed in the Assembly. It was the first item on the agenda of the Assembly, so that when it passed, women could then vote on the remaining agenda.

### **1994: Scriptural Principles for Ministry—Clergy**

The 65<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted the following item under “COMMITMENTS TO OUR MISSION AND VISION, CLERGY, B. For Implementation We Recommend: 4.”

*Recognition of the vital role women presently give in Church of God ministry—their teaching, preaching, administrative and leadership skills—and renewed encouragement and support for their ministry, in keeping with that obvious emphasis found in the Gospels, throughout the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles (Acts 16:14, 15, 40; 18:26; 21:8, 9; Romans 16:1-7; Titus 2:3-5).*

### **The 65<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 1994: Conferences**

The 65<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted a measure deleting “male” from S50. CONFERENCES, Called Conference, with the following:

- 1. The called conference consists of all members of the local church who wish to attend...*

At its inception in 1954, a Local Church Conference specified no gender requirement (46<sup>th</sup> Assembly, 1954, p. 32).

### **The 68<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2000: Female Minister**

The 68<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted an item, S25. FEMALE MINISTER, which states the following:

*Female ministers are to use the same ministerial titles as male ministers, with all the requirements, duties, responsibilities, and ministry opportunities of male ministers who hold either the first or second level of ministerial credentials as presently set forth in this book of Minutes of the International General Assembly. It is understood that female ministers are not eligible for ordination as bishop.*

### **2002–2010 General Assemblies: Church and Pastor’s Council**

A motion was presented at the 2002, 69<sup>th</sup> International General Assembly that would allow women to serve on the Church and Pastor’s Council. It was defeated in 2002, presented/defeated 2004, 2008 presented/defeated, and at the 2010, 73<sup>rd</sup> International General Assembly the following was adopted allowing women to serve on the Church and Pastor’s Council, S52.CHURH AND PASTOR’S COUNCIL, I. Selection:

- 1. When a local church deems it practical to have a Church and Pastor’s Council, said council shall be elected by the governing body of the church consisting of the loyal members. Members of the Church and Pastor’s Council shall be loyal members of the church.*

### **2007, Joint Session: International Council with the International Executive Council**

During a joint session of the International Council with the International Executive Council September 2007, a document concerning the ministry of women was presented for additional consideration. It was approved and forwarded to a committee for refinement, recommendation, and presentation to the Executive Council in January 2008.

The assignment was specifically “Women in Ministry” at all levels of the church, including the following items:

- Women serving on Local Pastor’s Council
- Women serving as District Overseer/Pastor
- Women serving as Territorial and National Council Members
- Women becoming Ordained Bishops in the Church of God

The study discovered that the *Minutes, S43. DISTRICT OVERSEERS* is not gender specific, and as such, there are instances of women serving as district overseers.

### **2012, Women in Ministry: Women Serving on Congregational Trial Board**

The 74<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted a motion to strike the word “male,” allowing women to serve on local congregational trial boards. This item is identified under S49. MEMBERSHIP, V. Procedure in Dealing With Member.

Also in 2012, the General Assembly adopted two similar measures striking the word “men” from requirements of two boards allowing women to be eligible for appointment. These two boards are as follows:

- S20. MINISTRY OF PUBLICATIONS, I. Ministry of Publications Board, A. Selection.
- S11. MINISTRY OF USA MISSIONS, I. USA Missions Board, A. Selection.

### **2014, Executive Council: Ordained Bishop—Female Eligibility Committee**

In response to action by the International Executive Council in April 2014, the “Ordained Bishop—Female Eligibility Committee” was appointed. The assignment was pursuant to the following instructions: “...complete study with recommendations regarding the full rights and privileges of women ministers in the Church of God and nomenclature of all ranks of ministry in the church and its impact on all credentialed ministers...and that a strategy for implementation be developed for inclusion on the 2016 International General Council agenda.”

The Committee submitted the following report:

*With regard to the rights and privileges of women in the Church of God, the Committee reports that women ministers have the same rights as male ministers, with the exception of the following, which are in the purview of the rank of Ordained Bishop:*

*May not serve as member of the Executive Committee or Executive Council*

*May not serve as State Administrative Bishop*

*May not normally serve as member of a State Council*

*May not serve as District Overseer*

*May not participate in an ordination service of an Ordained Bishop*

*With regard to the nomenclature of ministers, the Minutes of the General Assembly explain that the titles used for the three ranks of ministers in the Church of God are not biblical. They have been developed principally through tradition and common usage.*

The Committee recommended continuance of its work with emphasis upon determining appropriate nomenclature for the Church of God minister; the Committee be re-designated as the Committee on Ministerial Nomenclature; the Committee be expanded by two members with academic credentials qualified to address the issue from a biblical and historical perspective; and the issue be referred to the 2016–2018 Executive Council.

### **2016 Further Study: Meaning and Usage of the Term “Bishop” Report**

This study was approved to be completed and brought back to the 2018 General Council/Assembly. This current “Further Study” is that called for review.

## Statistical Review of Church of God Ministers by Rank/Gender, April 2018

In order to gain a holistic view of Church of God women in ministry, a current statistical review of ministers globally by rank and gender could provide clarity of the role of credentialed women in the church. The following data is presented from COG Business and Records as of April 17, 2018.

**TABLE 2: Statistical Review of Credentialed Ministers/Gender/Global Region**

<b>Credentialed Ministers/Gender</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	36,193 81.9
Female	<u>7,958</u> 18.0
TOTAL	44,151

<b>Credentialed Ministers/Gender/Global Region</b>	<b>% Region</b>	<b>% Global</b>
<b>Canada</b>		
Male	321 73.2	.0072
Female	<u>117</u> 26.7	.0026
TOTAL	438	.0099
<b>USA</b>		
Male	15,084 78.7	34.1
Female	<u>4,076</u> 21.2	9.2
TOTAL	19,160	43.3
<b>Foreign</b>		
Male	20,788 84.6	47.0
Female	<u>3,765</u> 15.3	8.5
TOTAL	24,553	55.6

<b>Pastors by Gender: USA and Canada</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	5262 94.9
Female	<u>280</u> 5.0
TOTAL	5542

### Statistical Summary

Dr. David Roebuck includes in his aforementioned dissertation statistical data (page 60) provided by the Church of God Office of Business and Records which demonstrates the percentage of women ministers in 1913, 12%; 1950, 18%; 1960, 14%; 1970, 11%; 1980, 8.6%; 1990, 7.7%; and currently (April 2018), the percentage of women ministers is 18% in the Church of God.

This “Further Study” report summarizes current data provided in the TABLE 2 above. It indicates that of the total number of Church of God credentialed ministers (44,151, all ranks), women constitute 18% of the total globally. In the USA, women comprise 21.2% of the total number of USA ministers (15,084, all ranks) and 9.2% globally. The foreign or global Church of God women credentialed ministers shows 15.3% identified as foreign (24,553, all ranks) and 8.5% globally. Finally, women embody 5% (280) of the total pastors (5,542) in the USA and Canada.

### **Women in Ministry: Facing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Twenty-one centuries since the birth of Christ; almost twenty-one centuries since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; and more than one hundred and thirty years since the genesis of a Pentecostal Movement called the Church of God. It started from humble beginnings on August 19, 1886, when a small group of believers met in the Barney Creek Meetinghouse about two miles from the Tennessee-North Carolina border. On that simple day that would become a momentous event, eight people decided and accepted an invitation to follow an unknown path with faith and Scripture as their guide. R.G. Spurling, Sr., two other men and five women stepped across the line of spiritual tradition and extended each other a hand of fellowship. Before the meeting concluded, a second invitation was given, and R.G. Spurling, Jr. and his wife Barbara were brought into the newborn Christian Union. It is unimaginable that the decision of this handful of sincere believers was the impetus for a spiritual movement trajectory that would become a leading Pentecostal church. It was the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At its inception, the Church of God witnessed six women who were charter members.

Now more than 130 years later, while the Church of God celebrates approximately 7 million members with a global outreach, it is at a pivotal place regarding women in ministry facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While there appears to be more opportunities for women today, there are some limitations for women in the Church of God’s structural and operational paradigm.

From the early history, the Church of God struggled with women in ministry. As a movement that experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have attempted to remain faithful to Scripture, the leading of the Spirit, and committed to communicate the gospel in the spirit and power of Pentecost. We acknowledge that on the Day of Pentecost the realization of the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy that both sons and daughters would prophesy came to pass. We find it difficult to understand or interpret some passages of Scripture that seem to on one side affirm women ministers while other passages seem to limit their roles. From one perspective, there are passages that seem to say women should not teach men, women should keep silent in church, women should not usurp authority over men, and the leadership position of ordained bishop is unacceptable.

Women have ministered in the Church of God since its very beginning, and now are actively involved in ministry throughout the church. Women were present on the Day of Pentecost. Women were filled with the Spirit and joined the ranks of a Pentecostal effusion acknowledging that “we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32) and understanding that “the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). And on that day, about three thousand souls were added and the Church was born.

In the early history of the Church of God, A.J. Tomlinson resolved the tension between silence and ministry engagement of women with the following solution. Tomlinson taught that Biblical references to “the church” where women are to remain silent are, in fact, business meetings. So, women are limited in speech regarding government, but not in acts of worship. Women could preach, but they could not participate in a local church conference or the General Assembly.

Dr. Dan Tomberlin articulates in an essay, *Adam, Eve, and Paul*, “Humankind originates from God and by nature of creation is interdependent as male and female. Just as the Holy Trinity is one divine essence, so too, humankind is one essence. Just as within the singular divine essence of the Holy Trinity they are three distinct, but equal. Within the singular human essence there are two distinct, but equal genders. Within humankind, a male is fully human and a female is fully human. Further, just as being male does not make one more human; being female does not make one less human.” Tomberlin asserts that Paul affirms the mutual subordination of male and female within marriage, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4). Men and women are equal.

Dr. Paul L. Walker authored a periodical titled, “Affirmation: A Call to Serve, the Role of Women in the Kingdom of God.” Dr. Walker states,

*God has always given women a special place even from the time of creation. The Gospels contain a total of 633 verses in which Jesus refers to women, and almost none of these are negative in tone. Not once did Jesus humiliate a woman. No word of deprecation ever fell from His lips. He did not lift women to the level of man, for He does not perceive people on levels, but accepts both men and women as persons.*

*Jesus affirmed women to become His followers and join His band of disciples. Women sensed something different in this man who cut through the barricades of Jewish tradition.*

*In first-century Judaism, according to the rabbis, a man was not to talk to a woman in the street. A woman was inferior in all things to a man. In court, a woman’s testimony was not considered valid. Women did not count as members of the congregation. For a Jewish congregation to exist required at least 10 men; nine men plus hundreds of women would not suffice. In the synagogue, women were required to sit separately from men. In*

*the temple, women could approach no closer than the outer Court of the Women. Woman's sphere was domestic; consequently, she received no education. Women were regarded as property, first of their fathers, then of their husbands. A husband could divorce his wife at will, but she could not divorce him. Men were considered superior; women, inferior. Men ruled; women obeyed.*

*Generally, only male names were listed in Jewish genealogies. The inclusion of four women in the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1 shows an astonishing change is about to take place. The Messiah would affirm women in an open and unheard-of manner.*

We have now come to a challenging crossroads. We allow women clergy to use the designation “ordained minister” and to perform all the ministry functions such as receive members into the local church, baptize new believers, administer marriage ceremonies, and other ministerial responsibilities. In addition, women now have a voice and a vote in the International General Assembly and in local church conferences, eligible to serve as church treasurer, eligible to serve on the Finance Committee, eligible to serve on the Church and Pastor’s Council, and eligible to participate on numbers of other boards, including state ministers meetings with voting privilege.

The main issue seems to be concerning credentialed women serving on the International Executive Council, the Church of God International General Council that determines the agenda of the International General Assembly, and to hold elected or appointed executive offices in the denomination such as state administrative bishop, executive council, or executive committee.

Position papers have been written, motions have been presented to the International General Council, and calls repeatedly for continued study regarding the meaning and usage of the term “bishop.” It is argued that specific Biblical passages have been used for centuries to limit the roles of women in the church; however, if these are taken as universal prohibitions, in every case, they directly contradict other passages that emphasize women in ministry.

For more than fifty years of Church of God history, the title “bishop” has been used, representing the highest order or rank of ministerial credentials. The main question seems to be, “Should women be ordained as bishops?” Some say “yes,” others “no.”

This “Further Study” was assigned the responsibility to address the need to change current nomenclature in order to clarify and also address the relatedness of three issues, including (1) titles for all ranks of ministry, (2) qualifications of ministry, and (3) women in ministry. As we look to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the importance of women in ministry, the magnitude of this issue and the commitment to unity as a movement encourages us to consider deliberate and meaningful dialogue regarding the understanding of all ministerial ranks and the interdependent relationship between each rank.

## CURRENT REALITIES

In order to “better address whether it is necessary to change the current nomenclature in order to clarify and fulfill the intent of the International General Council with respect to the designation of the ministerial rank in the Church of God,” it is imperative to ascertain current realities of the use of “ordained bishop” nomenclature, qualifications, and women in ministry.

1. The usage of “bishop” was common practice in the Church of God from 1909 until 1948. Its designation was for those who had oversight of a congregation and was subject to the leadership of a state overseer.
2. The change in 2000 from “licensed minister” and “ordained minister” to “ordained minister” and “ordained bishop” was viewed as a relevant action to reflect ministry positions of responsibility which may be more accurately designated by the title *bishop*.
3. In 2000, the bylaws of the International General Council and the International General Assembly were unified into one document as the Church of God Bylaws; thus, the title *Ordained Bishop* is now under the governance of the Bylaws.
4. The use of “bishop” seems to be based upon church tradition and varied Scriptural foundation.
5. Since the modification and reinstatement of the title *bishop* in 2000, there seems to be confusion or misunderstanding of how and when *bishop* should be used.
6. The title *bishop* has now been in use for eighteen years and in some regard is becoming more widely utilized.
7. Since the inception of Ordained Bishop in 2000, there have been repeated calls and directions for understanding the meaning and usage of the title *bishop*. In 2006, a narrative of the Biblical Understanding of Ordination and New Testament Designation of Church Ministries and Offices was adopted by the 71<sup>st</sup> International General Assembly. Yet, there are still queries regarding the title usage concerning legal and cultural issues.
8. A review of other Christian denominational usage of “bishop” reveals varied interpretations of how it should be incorporated into their structural polity.
9. A review of the *Minutes* reveals that the majority of ministry ranks, state/regional ministry positions/roles, and international-level ministry positions/roles do not provide any delineation of qualifications. What is provided is related to “Selection,” “Requirements,” and/or “Duties and Authorities.” As we move forward to achieve our Mission and Vision, all believers, ministers, and laity, should know the qualifications for specific ministry roles. Qualifications may include the following: Scriptural significance of position, ministry calling, skill sets (administration, leadership, giftedness, integrity, etc.), servant commitment, spiritual maturity, sufficient training, and experience.
10. There is a need to consider the credentialing process at the international level and its effective implementation.
11. Since the very beginning of the Church of God, women have been significantly involved. There have been modifications of women’s credentialing, ministry participation, and

ministry validation, yet, still there is a primary question, “Should women be ordained as bishops?” Some say “yes,” others “no.” The central import of the “bishop” issue may be the “women as bishop” issue. While some say the matter has been dealt with and should be forgotten, there are still those who consistently bring forth either veiled motions to try to get at the issue or endeavor to creatively find ways to “fix” what they believe is in error. Regardless of the opinion or position of any individual, the question remains. The church must develop a strategic direction to bring a solution or resolution to the issue.

## CONSIDERED OPTIONS

The following considered options are not calling for immediate action. This “study” process of the meaning and usage of the term “bishop,” related issues of ministry rank/titles, qualifications for ministry, and women in ministry has been in formal continuance since 2004. However, a strategic plan of action should be implemented to bring these matters to full resolution. The following options could be considered, formulated into appropriate motions, and brought to the 2020 International General Council.

1. Answer the question: Is it necessary to change the nomenclature from “bishop” to something else? The current study addresses if there is a need for change, cultural and legal impact, and any relatedness to other ranks of ministry. Literally, a change of nomenclature with the elimination of “bishop” and creation of something else is optional. Church of God and other denominations have created their own subjective hybrid definition of the current ranks of ministry, and as such, can continue. Or, return to earlier rank designations, or create a whole new ranking structure.
2. Option: Maintain current ministry rank titles and consider refinement of Qualifications and Rights and Authorities and address related issues under this paradigm.
3. Option: Consider returning to designation of ministry ranks identified as Exhorter, Licensed Minister, and Ordained. This action would call for a change in the Bylaws and require appropriate procedure and adaptation of polity. Further, develop a strategy to deal with the related issues should these ranks be changed.
4. Option: Consider returning to designation of ministry ranks identified as Exhorter, Licensed Minister, and Ordained with specific offices of state/regional leadership as Administrative Bishop, and executive leadership as Executive Bishop, and Presiding Bishop. This action would call for a change in Bylaws and require appropriate procedure and adaptation of polity. Further, the related issues would need to be addressed under this paradigm and its implementation.
5. If no changes to the title are deemed necessary, consider the harmonization of the *Minutes* as relates to current references of “bishop” and “overseer.” For example, the titles of General Overseer, Assistant General Overseer, and State Overseer are still in practice with more acceptance of Administrative Bishop; further, the *Minutes* describe the selection and duties and responsibilities of “District Overseer” (S43. DISTRICT OVERSEERS, page

134) without possible usage of “District Bishop.” This plan may not address the related issues with a strategy to deal with the questions.

6. Since 2000, there has been continued discussion related to the “Meaning and Usage of the Title *Bishop*.” A study was called for in 2004 and a narrative was approved in 2006, yet, there is a continued call for further study. Consider either acceptance of the current narrative approved by the International General Assembly, amplify the current narrative, or rewrite the narrative completely.
7. Review the “other” ministry ranks of minister of music, minister of Christian education and Lay Certification with attention to purpose, qualifications, and rights and authorities. These ranks are in decline and, in most cases, persons have moved directly into the primary ranks of ministry. Further, consider amplification of the *Minutes* with attention to accepted titles (minister, reverend, pastor, chaplain, etc.) and their definitions, meanings, purposes, roles, responsibilities, and ministrations.
8. Reassert and realize the recommendations enumerated in the *Minutes*, under the *Commitments to Our Mission and Vision, Clergy*, page 42.
9. Option: Appoint a Task Force Committee to study and prepare recommendations related to creation of needed qualifications for various ministry positions.
10. Option: Consider a strategy to convene opportunities for open dialogue and discussion regarding titles for all ranks of ministry, qualifications of ministry, and women in ministry.

## “FURTHER STUDY” SYNOPSIS

In synoptic review, the “Further Study” first identifies the tasks as described by the Motion. The Motion does not call for a theological discourse of the term “bishop.” It does call for (1) better address whether necessary to change the current nomenclature of “bishop”; (2) examine any effect the title “bishop” has on legal and cultural issues of the international and national church; and (3) the relatedness of the issues on the titles for all ranks of ministry.

The stated purpose of the “Further Study” was to objectively address the defined tasks with reference to historical perspective, biblical references, and cultural influence providing considered options and recommendation for moving forward.

### Historical Antecedence

The “Further Study” researched the historical antecedence of the usage of “bishop” in the Church of God, including the earliest engagement with documented references. As early as 1907, the “General Assembly Minutes” describe the ordination of a minister as a bishop. David Roebuck, church historian, provides a clear description of the ministerial ranks beginning in 1909 as the offices of bishop or elder, deacon, and evangelist.

In 1948, the Church of God modified its ministerial offices or ranks with the title “bishop” changed to “ordained minister”; evangelist changed to “licensed minister”; and “deacon” eliminated. In 2000, the 68<sup>th</sup> General Assembly changed the title for the “ordained” rank of ministry to “ordained bishop,” and “licensed minister” to “ordained minister.” In *Church of God Polity*, page 185, Dr. R. Hollis Gause, Church of God parliamentarian and professor, states that “ordained minister” is the most authoritative rank of the ministry of the Church of God and agrees to the older designation of “bishop.”

Following the change of titles by the International General Assembly, there was much discussion regarding the meaning and usage of the title “bishop.” The International General Assembly called for theological papers to provide clarity of the nomenclature for ministerial ranks. A narrative was adopted by the 71<sup>st</sup> International General Assembly in 2006 and included in the *Minutes*. Since 2006, there have been repeated calls for continued study with reports presented. In 2014, The International General Assembly called for a “Further Study” and presentation of finding at the 2018 International General Council.

### **Use of the Term Bishop in Variant Denominations**

This section provides synoptic information from a wide spectrum of variant denominations and their usage of ministerial rank titles. A quick review indicates that the usage of “bishop” is generally based on respective traditions and varied Scriptural interpretation. Some use the title for all ministers, some expressly for executive leadership, some for advancement of all ranks, and many other usages.

The implication is that the Church of God has its tradition; however, it is of primary magnitude to maintain our commitment to Scriptural integrity and interpretation.

### **Cultural, Legal, and Military Chaplaincy Issues**

The assignment of the motion was specific to legal and cultural issues. It should be noted that the current *Minutes* recognizes there may be cultural differences in various countries that limit the usage of the title “bishop” and the International General Assembly already provides flexibility internationally to use the title as appropriate.

Dennis W. Watkins, Legal Counsel for the Church of God, asserts that he has had no legal issues internationally regarding our use of the term “bishop.” However, he states that from time to time, it has been necessary to explain that our use of the term “bishop” is not synonymous with the use of the term in Methodist, Episcopal, and Catholic churches, where the bishop is a position indicating ecclesiastical supervision over a district, region, or diocese. He further delineates his legal opinion that in the United States, we can call our ministers by any title that we wish without any ramifications from the IRS, as long as they meet the definitions described in the section above.

Finally, the question of ordination is of considerable importance for Church of God clergy, both men and women, who serve as professionally trained military chaplains. From the perspective of the Chaplains Commission on the qualifications for COG military chaplains, all Church of God clergy who serve as chaplains must be viewed by the military officials and other religious organizations as being equally qualified to perform all religious functions of the Church of God.

### **Meaning and Usage of Ministerial Rank Titles**

While the Motion for “Further Study” does not call for definition or theological discourse regarding ministry titles, it should be observed that there are a number of titles utilized in the church that are not articulated in Church of God polity. For example, *Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order, and Governance* does not give definitions of a “minister,” “pastor,” “reverend,” “chaplain,” “clergy,” “elder,” and possibly others. Perhaps the greatest outcome of the “Further Study” is to influence positive attention upon the value and importance of all the various ministry ranks, positions, and titles, experiencing the realization of the Mission and Vision of the Church of God.

### **Qualifications in Ministry**

The task was to further study qualifications of ministry ranks and positions. The study presents a review of currently listed positions that have qualifications identified. It also speaks to the need of focus upon the credentialing process for the international church. A recommendation from a joint session of the International Executive Committee and the International Council is being considered.

### **Women in Ministry**

Since the early history of the Church of God, women in ministry have garnered contemplation, discussion, and debate regarding their role and engagement in ministry. The study addresses the historical perspective of women in ministry with documentation, provides a statistical review of Church of God ministers by rank/gender demonstrating that currently 18 percent of Church of God ministers globally are women and 5 percent are pastors in the USA and Canada.

The narrative addresses directly the primary issue of the usage of the title “bishop” and the role of women in various church roles and not in others. There are clearly different positions on the role of women in ministry. It suggests that there be opportunities during the 2018–2020 period to consider deliberate and meaningful dialogue regarding the understanding of all ministerial ranks and motions formulated for consideration at the 2020 International General Assembly.

### **Current Realities and Considered Options**

Finally, the “Further Study” lists Current Realities, Considered Options, and a Recommendation. The options do not call for immediate action; however, rather a strategic plan of implementation to bring full resolution. A recommendation is provided that calls for open Ministry Forums for

discussion, dialog and questions/answers. From the forums appropriate motions are to be formulated and brought to the 2020 International General Council.

Beyond the research, study, considered options, and recommendations may the leadership of the Church of God continue its sensitivity to thorough engagement of Scripture, devoted prayer, discussion, and deliberation seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the Church of God as a dynamic movement witness the realization of its Mission and Vision and the FINISH Commitment.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The “Further Study” was assigned the responsibility to address the need to change current nomenclature in order to clarify the intent of the International General Council with respect to the designation of the ministerial rank (bishop) in the Church of God; and also address the relatedness of three issues including the following: (1) titles for all ranks of ministry, (2) qualifications of ministry, and (3) women in ministry.

After comprehensive review of the research, information and data of the “Further Study” as mandated by the International General Council for presentation to the 2018 International General Assembly, and the repeated calls for study and further study for more than a decade, the following recommendation is submitted for consideration:

*That open Ministry Forums be conducted globally to provide opportunity for deliberate and meaningful discussion, dialogue, questions/answers, and time for spiritual insight, regarding the importance and understanding of ministry ranks, qualifications, and women in ministry with attention upon the meaning and usage of the title “Bishop.” Following the forums, appropriate motion(s) be formulated by the International Executive Council specifically addressing the stated issues and brought to the 2020 International General Assembly.*