

We Believe



ANDERSON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL of THEOLOGY

A Foreword



One of the distinctive marks of the Church of God movement is the long-standing idea that a written creed is not a necessary part of the commonly held resources of the fellowship. This does not, however, mean that there is a lack of devotion to a body of held beliefs. There has always been a commitment to the notion that God's truth and revelation are as dynamic as the Living God. And there has been the conviction that the movement would be tied together not by a set of commonly held beliefs, but rather by a common experience in Jesus Christ.

When the faculty of the Anderson University School of Theology first took on the task of putting into print some of these held beliefs some twenty-five years ago, they encountered a reluctance to have anything like a written creed. However, across these ensuing years, no document has been more requested by pastors, lay leaders, and congregations searching for an outline of introduction for the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) than the little folder titled *We Believe*. Beliefs have always been within the mainstream of the historic witness of the Christian church and growing out of a high view of biblical inspiration. And yet these beliefs have yielded to the higher

calling embraced by this fellowship to find a uniting faith in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

And so it seemed timely after these twenty-five years to consider anew how this movement could make clear to those who might inquire just what are the beliefs of this group. Dean David Sebastian took on the task of bringing together the entire seminary faculty and staff to offer a fresh expression of this witness. Associate dean and professor of Christian theology Gilbert Stafford took a sabbatical leave to talk about these matters with church leaders in numerous gatherings around the globe where the Church of God is at work. Such conversations informed the work that has brought together these modest lines we now present as a witness to our faith. It is our hope that by sharing these ideas we will strengthen and extend the fellowship of the Church of God and the wider family of God.

James L. Edwards, *President*
Anderson University
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We believe in one eternal, holy, and loving God who calls us to respond in faith. We, therefore, give the following testimony of our faith, realizing that for testimonies of faith to

be Christian they must conform to God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Although we can never put into a short document all that we are taught in the Bible, we do affirm the following:

REVELATION

God is revealed generally in the created order and in the human conscience.

This Living God, however, has spoken especially to us in the covenantal story of the whole of Scripture and definitively in Jesus Christ.

We believe in, treasure, and cherish the Bible as the written Word of God, and hold that the sixty-six books of the Protestant biblical canon constitute the Holy Scriptures. We believe that both the Old and New Testaments are necessary for understanding God's revelation in Scripture, both of which are to be interpreted in light of the revelation given to us in Jesus Christ. The Bible is inspired by God and is fully authoritative and sufficient for Christian life and practice. We further believe that the Bible is historically reliable and that its message is faithfully preserved in the textual tradition.

We rejoice that the biblical gospel is the good news of God's love to our world!

GOD

We believe in one God in three persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who created all things visible and invisible, and out of chaos created

order. Our hearts are made glad that God is fully revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who was born to the Virgin Mary through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and lived on earth as both fully human and fully divine. We are grateful that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth, convicts us of sin, leads us to and incorporates us into Christ, and empowers us for Christian witness. We worship the one eternally triune God!

SIN AND SALVATION

We acknowledge that all have sinned, thus breaking our relationships with God, self, others, and the whole created order, but give thanks for God's salvation from sin.

We believe that, through his exemplary life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection, Jesus Christ is the only sufficient atonement for our sins. In keeping with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus died on the cross and was raised for our salvation. He returned to the Father and there intercedes for us. God's work of salvation is all by grace, not by our merits. We receive this great salvation when, by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We hold that we are secure in our salvation so long as we remain faithful to Christ. We are grateful that the same power that raised Christ from the dead raises us from spiritual death, saving us from sin to follow Christ in this life and

to live with him eternally. We believe that it is God's will for us to live in holiness. Indeed, it is God who makes us holy. We, however, are called to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God for the sake of God's mission in the world. We understand the life of holiness to be wholehearted love for God and neighbor. Although we are never to seek suffering for the sake of suffering, we are convinced that holiness often is deepened through life's inevitable sufferings. Furthermore, Christ invites us to participate in his sufferings in this fallen world. We recognize with Scripture that Satan and demons exist as spiritual realities in opposition to God. But we are grateful that God has conquered all sin and evil, thereby giving us victory both now and forever. *Great is the salvation of our God!*

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

With gratitude we believe that we experience the Reign of God as the presence, love, and power of God in our lives, in the church, in history, and in the whole created order, now and in the future consummation. We believe that Jesus lived and proclaimed the Reign of God, a life of reconciliation and peacemaking in fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Under the Reign of God, we are required to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. We believe that God comes alongside the vulnerable and oppressed,

and stands against every form of evil, even when found in the institutional church. As the people of God, we too are called to make justice and to intervene when injustice occurs. We anticipate the future consummation of the Reign of God, at the time of the one and only return of our Lord, who will carry out final judgment separating the righteous and the unrighteous. **“Even so, come Lord Jesus!”**

THE CHURCH

We believe the church is the fellowship of the redeemed, the body of Christ, the people of God, chosen by God for mission in the world.

At the beginning of time, God created humankind to be partners in mission. However, humankind failed in this partnership. In the course of time, though, God chose Israel to bless all peoples. But in the fullness of time, it was in Jesus Christ that God brought salvation for all people. And until the end of time, God has chosen the church to be the body of Christ with the mission of making disciples. It is for this purpose that God continually reforms the church so that it will be conformed to the image of Christ.

We are grateful that in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We believe that the evidence of this outpouring is the personal holiness of God’s people and their empowerment for divine mission in the world. The Holy

Spirit distributes a variety of spiritual gifts among all members of the church for accomplishing this mission.

We believe God calls all people to respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ, whereby they become members of the universal church of God. With Christ as the head, this community is the body of Christ on earth. We understand each local congregation to be an expression of this universal church, and that it is God’s will for each believer to be a committed member of a local congregation.

In obedience to our Lord, we baptize believers by immersion as a sign of death to sin, resurrection to new life in Christ, and incorporation into the mission of the people of God. We celebrate the Lord’s Supper as participation in and proclamation of the death and resurrection of our Lord until he comes. We wash each other’s feet, following Jesus who assumed the role of servant by washing the feet of his disciples. We anoint with oil in the name of the Lord and pray that people may be healed.

We believe that all who repent and confess Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord are part of the church of God. We seek mutually enriching fellowship with all who share this personal faith. Aware of racial, cultural, and other diversity around the globe, we are committed to working for the visible unity of the one church that is rooted in biblical faith.

Our Lord empowers believers to

do the work of ministry. Jesus instructed us to model our ministries and manner of leadership after his example of being a servant rather than seeking positions of power. We understand that it is the church’s responsibility, in response to God’s call, to appoint and equip gifted women and men to a variety of leadership responsibilities for building up the body of Christ.

We praise God for the privilege of participating in the life of the church!

CONCLUDING AFFIRMATION

In devotion to Christ as the head of the church, we desire to be a biblical people, a people who worship the triune God, a people transformed by the grace of God, a people of the Kingdom of God, a people committed to building up the one, universal church of God, and a people who in God’s love care for the whole world.

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