



CHURCH *of* GOD *of* PROPHECY

**THE BIBLICAL
DOCTRINE
AND POLITY
COMMITTEE
REPORT**

to the
2026 INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE AND POLITY COMMITTEE TO THE 103RD INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY, JULY 15–19, 2026 ORLANDO, FLORIDA, USA

Preamble

1 The members of the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee (BDP) consider it an honor to serve this church body. We celebrate the global nature of this church and seek to serve our worldwide constituency. The International Assembly (IA) designated the BDP as an assembly standing committee “to serve the Church by preparing an exposition for dialogue on universal matters of biblical doctrine, theology, ethics, and polity for Assembly consideration.”¹ Committed to this task, we have engaged in deliberative collaboration, intensive research, and writing in preparation for the 103rd International Assembly. Every matter before this committee has not been addressed in this report due to ongoing study.

2 The report consists of two subjects. First, the subject of “Sacrament of Water Baptism” is presented. This document completes the BDP’s trilogy of biblical sacraments. Water baptism is a doctrinal matter, and the recommendations in this report will require one accord, defined as 90 percent, for approval. Second, “International Assembly Business Policies and Procedures” are addressed in this report. Assembly policy and procedures are polity matters; thus, the business policies and procedures document will require overwhelming consensus, defined as 75 percent, for approval.

3 Consistent with the business protocol established in the 2024 International Assembly, the following guidelines are to govern the 2026 International Assembly business sessions:

¹ *Minutes of the 95th Assembly*, 2008, 49.

1. Once the moderator has acknowledged the respective chairman and members of the Assembly Committees, providing them permission to present their reports, they will do so in due course.
2. Committee members will present sections to the IA for its consideration.
3. Once the section and recommendations have been clearly placed before the IA, the moderator will call for a motion and a second for discussion/questions of said section/recommendations.
4. Any member in good standing (faithful to the local church and faithful in tithing) may request to speak from the Assembly floor at a designated microphone. He/she will provide his/her name to the clerk stationed at the microphone.
5. The moderator will recognize a constituent at the microphone.
6. Prior to making a comment or posing a question, the member at the microphone is to provide the following information:
 - a. name
 - b. location of church membership
 - c. acknowledgement that he/she has read the report in its entirety in order to be granted permission to speak by the moderator
7. Unless the speaker is raising a point of order, the question/comment is to be directed to the committee. Points of order are directed to the moderator. The chairman, the presenter of the section, or any of the members of the committee may engage in the discussion. All questions/comments related to the report are to be directed to and responded to by the committee.
8. At any point, the moderator may interject, ask a question, and/or request further clarification from either the speaker from the floor or the committee.
9. The moderator, in due course, will call for an Assembly response. Matters of business require overwhelming consensus. Spiritual matters require one accord.

International Assembly Business Policies and Procedures

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1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1. The International Assembly Business Policies and Procedures establishes guidelines to govern the decision-making process of the Assembly.
- 1.2. These guidelines apply only to matters properly submitted by the Standing Assembly Committees (Finance and Stewardship Committee, Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, and the Corporate Board) for decision by the International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy.

2. Pre-Assembly Procedures

- 2.1. Reports and proposals shall be translated and distributed to national, state, and regional bishops at least three (3) months before the opening session of the Assembly. These bishops should ensure that the documents are forwarded to the local church pastors in their areas of service.
 - 2.1.1. The documents will also be available at www.cogop.org.
- 2.2. Each local church, under its pastor's guidance, shall review, study, and discuss the reports received. Any member or church (through its pastor) may direct questions, concerns, or suggestions to the appropriate committee regarding the Assembly documents.
- 2.3. Any questions, concerns, or recommendations should be sent to the relevant Assembly Committee at least six (6) weeks before the International Assembly. They must include the sender's name, complete contact details, membership location, and a reference to the specific area of concern in the business document.
- 2.4. Contact information for the committees will be listed in the business documents.

3. International Assembly Procedures

- 3.1. Environment
 - 3.1.1. All sessions should be filled with prayer, guided by the Holy Spirit, and conducted within an orderly framework that shows respect for God and others.
- 3.2. Moderator
 - 3.2.1. The moderator manages order and decorum during the Assembly's business sessions. While maintaining a spirit of prayerful unity, the moderator may alter speaking times, recognize participants, and call for breaks at his discretion.
- 3.3. Participation
 - 3.3.1. Business sessions will be open to all members in good standing of the Church of God of Prophecy. Members are to be faithful tithers and have read the entire report that is being addressed.
 - 3.3.2. All members who wish to participate in the Assembly's business sessions must be seated in the designated area. To have their expressions counted, members must be present in that area when the moderator calls for expressions. No one may speak in absentia or delegate their speaking rights by proxy.
- 3.4. Discussion Process
 - 3.4.1. At the start of the business session, the moderator should set the time each delegate has to speak. This time can be adjusted by the moderator, especially if translation is required.
 - 3.4.2. The committee or the moderator introduces reports and proposals to the Assembly.
 - 3.4.3. Anyone wishing to speak during the business session, who meets the requirements stated in 3.3.1, should state their name, place of membership, ministry (if any), and briefly express their statement, question, concern, or suggestion.
 - 3.4.4. Once the moderator has called for an end to the discussions, he may ask for expressions.
- 3.5. Expression Process
 - 3.5.1. Decision making will depend on the expressions made during the call for expressions. In the first call for expressions, the moderator will request delegates to approve, disapprove, or abstain.

- 3.5.1.1. Expressing abstention does not count toward either the total percentage in favor or in opposition of the proposal.
- 3.5.2. Matters of policy or finance will be approved by overwhelming consensus, defined as at least 75 percent of supporters endorsing the proposal.
- 3.5.3. Doctrinal matters require a “one-accord” decision which will be reached when 90 percent of the members express support for the proposal.
- 3.5.4. If the approval percentage is within a five percent margin of acceptance, the moderator will initiate a second expression. This involves asking delegates who initially disapproved of the proposal if they are willing to reconsider and support its approval.
- 3.5.5. Any individual exhibiting a disruptive or obstinate attitude in the area where business is conducted may be removed at the discretion of the moderator, the Assembly Counselors, and/or Assembly Security.

4. Revisions, Updates, and Changes

- 4.1. The BDP has the authority to make procedural adjustments to the process for conducting Assembly business in collaboration with the Presiding Bishop and the General Presbyters (*93rd Assembly Minutes* 2004, 112).
- 4.2. This document replaces the previous Assembly Business processes, taking effect for the proceedings of our next International Assembly in 2028.

The Sacrament of Water Baptism

Introduction

5 During the 2024 International Presbytery meeting, a statistical review was provided to the International Presbytery by the Office of the Presiding Bishop that showed that through the global ministry of the Church of God of Prophecy during the years 2022–2024, the number of people saved was 218,546, while 71,230 were baptized in water.² These numbers reveal a significant disparity between those coming to Christ and those following Jesus in water baptism, and indicate the need for us to give greater attention to the ordinance/sacrament of Water Baptism.

Biblical-Theological Meaning of Water Baptism

6 Christian water baptism “has its precedent in the Jordan baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.”³ Mark, in his gospel, which he calls “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,

² Statistical Review Presented to the International Presbytery of the Church of God of Prophecy International, 2024 (Appendix 1).

³ Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2010), 108.

the Son of God” (1:1),⁴ declares John as the messenger, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord (1:2–3). John’s ministry location was not the temple in Jerusalem, but the wilderness of Judea. Even though the baptism of John had in common with Jewish washings the theme of purification, what made his baptism unique is that he came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (v. 4). The fact that he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins “carried with it an implicit criticism of the Jerusalem temple and its rituals” for “in Israel forgiveness of sins was obtained through the sacrifices at the temple.”⁵ The old order of the temple with its mediating priests and sacrifices was going to be replaced by the ministry and offering of Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

7 Jesus himself came to the Jordan river to be baptized by John. Matthew states that John consented to baptize Jesus after knowing that his baptism was “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). After Jesus had been baptized, and he “came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’” (vv. 16–17). Jesus’s baptism reveals his submission and obedience to the will of his Father. The Father responds by opening the heavens and sending the Spirit, who came like a dove and rested upon him. The Father also declared that Jesus was his Son, his Beloved, with whom he was well pleased. This was a public confirmation that, as Son of God, Jesus was able to fulfill all righteousness.

Water Baptism and Forgiveness of Sin

8 If Jesus had no sin, why then did he need to be baptized? In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul declared, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” By accepting John’s baptism of repentance, “Jesus made a vicarious confession of sin for all humanity.”⁶ Oscar Cullman sees in God’s declaration, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1. Jesus is “designated Son, in so far as, in the role of Servant of God, he takes the guilt of his people upon himself in his suffering and death.”⁷ While other Jews are baptized for their own sins, Jesus “must suffer representatively for the sins of the people. This means that Jesus is baptized in view of his death, which effects forgiveness of sins for all men. For this reason Jesus must unite himself in solidarity with his whole people, and go down himself to Jordan, that ‘all righteousness might be fulfilled.’”⁸ By submitting himself to John for baptism, Jesus set the

⁴ All Scriptures will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise specified.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 90.

⁶ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 109.

⁷ Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Great Britain: Fletcher & Son Ltd., 1978), 18.

⁸ Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 18.

example for his followers. This means that the gospel of Jesus requires baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

9 This message was also carried out by the disciples. On the day of Pentecost, Peter ended his sermon commanding the people, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Acts 2:38). This relationship between baptism and the forgiveness of sins is also echoed in Paul’s report of his conversion in Acts 22:16, where he refers to the words of Ananias who was sent by Jesus to pray for him: “And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.”

10 Paul makes another connection between baptism and forgiveness of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. The apostle lists a series of sins that were practiced by many of the Corinthian believers before coming to Jesus and reminds them of the change effected on them when they were saved: “But you were washed [aorist middle indicative second person plural], you were sanctified [aorist passive indicative second person plural], you were justified [aorist passive indicative second person plural] in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11). The verbs washed, sanctified, and justified are in the aorist tense which refers to a singular occurrence in the past. Sanctification and justification, being in the passive voice, “indicate that God did the sanctifying and justifying to the convert.” The middle voice of the washing, “probably does not have the force of washing yourselves, but of getting washed, so the cleansing too would be by God.”⁹ It is worth noting that Paul brings together baptism, sanctification, and justification. For him, “the three verbs belong together and are not to be separated from baptism. Hence, baptism is connected with sanctification and justification.”¹⁰

11 Writing to Titus, Paul reinforces the relationship between baptism and forgiveness of sins through the righteousness of Jesus and the participation of the Holy Spirit: “He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

12 Andrew R. Williams states that “though some Pentecostals are hesitant to relate baptism too closely to the forgiveness of sins, one might consider that it is not baptism that forgives sin, but God. As Acts 2.38 states, people are baptized in the authority of Christ in the power of the Spirit.”¹¹ Williams stresses that “even though God has chosen to associate the forgiveness of sins with the water rite this does not mean that forgiveness of sins is not God’s doing, nor does it mean that forgiveness of sins is solely contained within the rite.” The effectiveness, he says, “is bound up with the Holy Spirit.”¹² Gordon T. Smith states that “in baptism, we receive the

⁹ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 150.

¹⁰ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 150.

¹¹ Andrew Ray Williams, *Washed in the Spirit: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Water Baptism* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2021), 220.

¹² Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 221.

forgiveness of sins, not the removal of sin.”¹³ The removal of sins requires sanctification which “comes by way of a continual cooperation with God in baptismal grace throughout a lifetime.” Forgiveness of sins in and “through baptism is only possible because it is intimately linked with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ “Therefore, in baptism, one is not only identified *with* Christ but forgiven *by* Christ and enabled to share in his life.”¹⁵ Karl Barth asks, “Is then the outward bathing the washing away of sins?” He answers in the negative, echoing 1 John 1:7 that “only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost cleanses us from all sin.”¹⁶ It is necessary to clarify that it is not the water that cleanses us from all sin, but the blood of Jesus. Baptism is the natural response of the believer after his sins have been forgiven by Jesus and cleansed by his blood.

Water Baptism Is Participation in Christ’s Death, Burial, and Resurrection

13 In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul declared that God, “for our sake made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In the same way that Jesus took upon himself the sins of humanity when he was baptized by John, in water baptism, we participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

14 Paul evidences the believer’s participation in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection through baptism in Romans 6:3–6:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

15 In this passage, Paul describes what happens to the believer when she or he is baptized. First, we are baptized into Christ. That phrase could mean “to Christ” or “with reference to (with regard to) Christ.”¹⁷ Some scholars see in this expression an abbreviation of “into the name of [the Lord] Christ Jesus,” while others interpret it as meaning “into union with Christ.”¹⁸ Christian

¹³ Gordon T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 142, quoted in Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 221.

¹⁴ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 221.

¹⁵ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 221–22.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, trans. Ernest A. Payne (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1948), 27.

¹⁷ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 156.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 360.

baptism not only brings the believer into union with Christ, but it also joins the believer with his death.¹⁹

16 In baptism, we not only die with Christ, but we are buried with him. As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We could say that in baptism, the believer participates proleptically²⁰ in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Barth refers to this as a supremely critical event that transpires in baptism. Barth takes the believer back in time to AD 30 outside Jerusalem on the cross at Golgotha (death), in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea (burial), and on Easter Sunday (resurrection). In his new life, “he is now dead to sin, but has become alive unto God for an existence in His service.”²¹

17 Douglas J. Moo, on the other hand, brings into consideration the present experience of the individual in baptism. He states that before “concluding that A.D. 30 was the ‘time’ of our burial with Christ,” Paul talks about actions happening to believers during their present time—such as referenced in Romans 6, verses 2 [“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”], 14 [“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace”], and 17–22 [“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin . . . now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. . . . But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness . . .”]—that “suggests that the transition from the old life to the new has taken place in the conscious experience of the believer.” He also states that “the reference to baptism likewise draws attention to the lifetime of the believer,” and, lastly, “many of Paul’s ‘with Christ’ statements include references to the life experience of the individual.” Moo concludes that “our dying, being buried, and being resurrected with Christ are experiences that transfers us from the old age to the new. But the transition from old age to new, while applied to individuals at their conversion, has been accomplished through the redemptive work of Christ on Good Friday and Easter.”²²

18 The identification of the believer with Christ in baptism is highlighted by the “quite striking number of words compounded with the preposition ‘with’ (*syn*)—‘buried with’ (6:4), ‘united with’ (6:5), ‘crucified with’ (6:6), ‘died with and shall live with’ (6:8).” Ferguson adds that “the believer is described as actually present with and involved with the unique experience

¹⁹ Moo, “Epistle to the Romans,” 360.

²⁰ Prolepsis: “That which anticipates a future event. The resurrection of Jesus Christ may be seen as anticipating the final consummation and future resurrection of humans, and thus as proleptic.” McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 223. Steven J. Land explains this concept further, stating that in worship, “Pentecostals traveled in the Spirit forward or backwards in time—back to Sinai, back to Calvary, back to Pentecost—forward to Armageddon, the Great White Throne Judgment, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Time and space were fused and transcended in the Spirit. . . .” Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 55.

²¹ Barth, *Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, 11.

²² Moo, “Epistle to the Romans,” 364–65.

of Christ.” He concludes that “there is no participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ without baptism.”²³

19 There is an ethical demand to our identification with Christ. We are called to walk in newness of life (6:4). Since we have been “united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (6:5). Our “old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin” (6:6). Christ’s death and resurrection was definitive, and for that reason “death no longer has dominion over him” (6:9). Our death in Christ renders the power of sin over us ineffective. Paul gives us some imperatives required from our identification with Christ. We “must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11); “do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.” (6:12); “no longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life” (6:13). The new life of the believer identified with Christ is characterized by a radical change by which she/he can live a life of victory over sin as Christ did.

Water Baptism Anticipates the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

20 Each time John the Baptist introduced Jesus (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16), he presented him as the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In John 1:33, the Baptist testified that the one who sent him to baptize in water told him that “he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

21 The coming of the Spirit upon Jesus is recorded by the gospel writers: “When Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him” (Matthew 3:16). Mark states, “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart (*schizō*) and the Spirit descending like a dove on him” (Mark 1:10). Luke reports that “when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21–22a). John records the words of the Baptist as follows: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain him” (John 1:32 NIV).

22 These Scriptures show the correlation between water baptism and baptism with the Holy Spirit. While “water baptism is the Christian rite that represents the believer’s regeneration by the Spirit,” at the same time, “it anticipates the fullness of the Spirit.”²⁴ John’s baptism anticipated baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16).

23 The apostle Peter acknowledged the connection between water baptism and Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brought conviction to those who heard Peter’s sermon and “were cut to the heart.” They “said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter’s reply was: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”

²³ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 157.

²⁴ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 125.

(Acts 2:37–38). For the earliest Christians, “the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River was the paradigm for all Christian baptisms. It was expected that as the believers came up out of the baptismal waters, the Holy Spirit would descend upon them. Christian water baptism was more than a ritual washing; it was an encounter.”²⁵

24 The relationship between water baptism and Spirit baptism is indicated in Paul’s encounter with some disciples in Ephesus. Paul’s first question to them was “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” Their response was that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. Paul discovered that they had been baptized into John’s baptism of repentance and then led them to believe in Jesus, the one coming after John. After they believed in Jesus, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Paul “laid his hands on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:2–6). Apparently, the expectation of the early Christians was that in the same way that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus when he came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit would come upon those who receive Jesus and follow him in water baptism.

25 Frank D. Macchia notes the relationship between water baptism and the baptism in the Holy Spirit in relation to the missional responsibility of the believer. Following Jesus’s example of missionary activity after his Holy Spirit baptism, he states:

The Christ who received the Spirit after his baptism, then commissioned his disciples to engage in their mission among all nations, to disciple others, and to baptize them “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). The Pentecost event hovers in the background of this charge, for water baptism as practiced throughout the church’s Spirit-empowered mission was also to bear the name of that very same Spirit that rested on Christ. We are baptized in the name of the Father, who sent the Son and promised the Spirit. We are baptized in the name of the Son, who was sent by the Father and who incorporates us into himself by baptizing us in the Spirit. We are baptized in the name of the Spirit, who bears witness of the Son and shapes us into the image of the Son so that we can hallow the Father’s name—on earth as it is in heaven.”²⁶

26 Peter’s declaration on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” was connected to another promise: “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:38–39). This promise transcends generations, national frontiers, and time, and is inclusive of everyone. Our prayers and our expectations must be raised for people being baptized in the Holy Spirit during our baptism services.

²⁵ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 126.

²⁶ Frank C. Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 332.

Baptism Is the Entrance to a New Community

27 The church is the new community of God. As we have already seen in Romans 6, our life in Christ calls us to live in newness of life. This community of born-again Christians transcends generations, national frontiers, and time and must be recognized by the unity of its members. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jew or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

28 This new community welcomes all who believe and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. While circumcision was the sign of entry into covenant with God under the Old Covenant of the law and was only for male Jews and proselytes, in the New Covenant of grace, water baptism is inclusive for everyone, and all can be in Christ. Thus, in the New Covenant of grace, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, servants and children are baptized. Jesus’s new community is characterized by its inclusive and non-discriminatory nature.

29 In Acts we find evidence that the apostles baptized people from different ethnic backgrounds, demonstrating that the new community was indeed open to those who believed. Philip baptized the Samaritans, both men and women (Acts 8:12); he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, who according to Deuteronomy 23:1 was forbidden to enter the assembly or congregation of the Lord. However, in Isaiah 56:4–5, the Lord makes a promise to the eunuchs: “For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” The Ethiopian eunuch confronted Philip with a statement and a question, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Maybe Philip thought about the prohibition in Deuteronomy but saw the promise of Isaiah and the confession of the eunuch believing in Jesus, and he had no other option but to baptize him. Peter baptized the household of Cornelius, opening the door for the Gentiles (Acts 10:48). In this way, the apostles fulfilled Jesus’s commands for inclusion in his body, the church.

30 In Galatians 3:26–29, Paul talks about baptism to strengthen his argument that “the Church is a new community in which former social, gender, and ethnic barriers are no longer applicable.”²⁷ Paul argues that if the Galatians were children of God (v. 26) who were “clothed with Christ” (v. 27), then “the former social, ethnic, and gender categories dividing them are now overcome by their participation in Christ through baptism.”²⁸ This new community in Christ “is in stark contrast to the larger world of which it is part, and thereby lives in tension to it; a world that is characterized by social, ethnic, and gender divisions.”²⁹

²⁷ Matthias Wenk, “The Church as Sanctified Community” in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. John Christopher Thomas (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 120.

²⁸ Wenk, “The Church as Sanctified Community,” 121.

²⁹ Wenk, “The Church as Sanctified Community,” 121.

As Matthias Wenk affirms:

For Paul baptism signifies the believers' "being in Christ" and "being Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:29), yet this communion with Christ, this belonging to God, cannot be separated from its ecclesial dimension, for to be in Christ implies to live in an inclusive community as Christ initiated a new community of acceptance, reconciliation, and peace. The purification of sins, signified with baptism, includes more than simply the washing away of an individual's immorality; it includes the washing away of social, gender, and ethnic barriers that separates people from each other; it thereby creates a community of acceptance, love, forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.³⁰

Water Baptism in the History of the Church of God of Prophecy

31 Water baptism has been one of the official teachings of the Church of God of Prophecy. The official list of accepted teachings by the Church of God appeared on the August 15, 1910, edition of the *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*. It included water baptism by immersion, listing Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:9–10, John 3:22–23, and Acts 8:36–38 as Scripture references. This same edition contains the examination questions for candidates for the ministry, experiences and qualifications. The first question is "Have you been baptized by immersion?"³¹

32 Throughout the history of the Church of God of Prophecy, several questions regarding water baptism have surfaced. These questions were usually brought to the General Assemblies for study, discussion, and response. In the *Assembly Minutes*, we find those questions and how they were answered at that time. Several of those questions are still being asked today. We will cover some of them and will provide our response to those questions.

One Baptism or More?

33 One of the practices that has characterized the Church of God of Prophecy has been rebaptism. Maybe we get this practice from A. J. Tomlinson. He was influenced by Frank W. Sandford and his Holy Ghost and Us Bible School in Shiloh, Maine.

34 Tomlinson's first baptism at Shiloh was on All Hallows Eve, 1897. According to R. G. Robins, Tomlinson "waded into that most un-Quakerly of ordinances, water baptism," and when he emerged from the frigid river, "like Christ he heard a voice proclaim, 'This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.'"³²

35 But A. J. Tomlinson was not alone in this decision of obeying God in baptism. This was a family matter as we learn that his wife, Mary Jane, requested her name to be dropped from the

³⁰ Wenk, "The Church as Sanctified Community," 121–22.

³¹ *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, August 15, 1910, 3.

³² R. G. Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 120.

church books. She requested, “Dear friends: As I believe in being loyal to the Church I love, of which I have always being a member, and as it does not embrace water baptism and I feel it my duty to partake of the same, I kindly ask that my name be dropped from the church books” (Minutes of the Westfield Monthly Meeting, March 31, 1898).³³ And A. J. Tomlinson made his request two months later: “I hereby request my membership with Friends to cease together with my minor children.”³⁴ This was the definitive departure from his Quaker roots.

36 After Tomlinson’s first baptism, he was baptized again by Sandford himself on October 1, 1901. He wrote in his diary: “I was baptized by Mr. Sandford in the Andrascogin [*sic*] River. Into the ‘church of the living God,’ for the evangelization of the world, gathering of Israel. New order of things at the close of the Gentile age.”³⁵

37 The third time A. J. Tomlinson was baptized was on Saturday, August 16, 1913. “He desired to be baptized by a Church of God minister.”³⁶ This baptism was performed by T. L. McLain. Tomlinson wrote his experience in his diary:

Some time during prayer I had got a little vision of Brother McLain and myself passing near our baptizing pool and I got him to baptize me, so last Saturday morning we were called to go and pray for Tom Priest who was sick and this called us by the place, so on our return I asked Brother McLain to baptize me. He was much surprised, but I insisted and although I had been baptized twice before I got him to baptize me.³⁷

38 Probably Tomlinson’s third baptism by a Church of God minister set up the practice of rebaptizing everyone who wanted to join the Church of God, even if they came already baptized by an ordained minister from their denominations. This rebaptism practice was also extended to those who were excluded from the Church if they had backslidden and wanted to come back.

39 During the 31st Assembly of 1936, the question was asked, “After a member has been excluded and then come back, should he take the covenant as at the first?”

40 The answer to the question was given: “This has been the practice all the years. He should take the covenant as a new member. If he has been backslidden he should be baptized over.”³⁸

³³ Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson*, 123–24.

³⁴ Robins, *A. J. Tomlinson*, 124.

³⁵ A. J. Tomlinson, *Diary of A. J. Tomlinson: 1901-1924*, The Church of God Movements Heritage Series (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2012), 28.

³⁶ C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1973), 1:418.

³⁷ A. J. Tomlinson, *Diary: 1901-1924*, 207.

³⁸ C. T. Davidson, *Upon This Rock* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1974), 2:580.

41 The biblical grounding to practice rebaptism was taken from Revelation 2:5. M. A. Tomlinson writes:

If a person who has once known the Lord should fall God and go back into sin, it is necessary for him to be baptized again when he repents and returns to God. This point is brought out in the message of John the Revelator to the Church at Ephesus, as recorded in Revelation 2:5: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Since baptism is one of the first works, or one of the first evidences that an individual has accepted Christ, if he falls from grace to the extent that it is necessary for him to repent, it would be necessary for him to be baptized in water again.”³⁹

42 On one hand, M. A. Tomlinson’s rationale for rebaptism confirms the position that repentance and baptism go hand in hand. Tomlinson further stated that if one falls into sin, he/she is to repent and be baptized again. On the other hand, what is striking is that the scripture Tomlinson used to justify rebaptism has nothing to do with water baptism, since Jesus is only calling the church at Ephesus to repent and does not mention anything about being baptized in water again. In fact, the New Testament does not mention people being rebaptized after being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

43 Daniel Tomberlin states that “this seems to be a hermeneutical stretch. There is no explicit suggestion in the New Testament that a believer who has fallen into sin should be rebaptized. Throughout church history, water baptism has always been understood as a single unrepeated initiatory event.”⁴⁰

44 What comes into play with rebaptism is the questioning of the power of the name of Jesus. Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, carries with it the authority of the Trinity. “To invoke the name of Jesus has great power that is not to be disdained.”⁴¹

45 What then must be done when people fall back into sin? Jürgen Moltmann asserts that “the efficacy of baptism is not restricted to the actual moment of baptism.” He states that “the baptized person acquires the means of repentance, through which he can regain baptismal grace daily. Repentance is continual life in baptismal grace on the basis of the baptism that has been performed once and for all.”⁴² When believers fall into sin, the biblical remedy is confession and

³⁹ M. A. Tomlinson, *Basic Bible Beliefs* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1961), 22.

⁴⁰ Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 146–47.

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 386.

⁴² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 228.

restoration—not rebaptism (1 John 1:9; Galatians 6:1). Our Statement of Faith declares, “We believe in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁴³

Baptismal Formula: Trinitarian Formula versus Jesus’s Name Only Formula

46 The subject of baptism in Jesus’s name only came to the attention of the 13th Assembly. The question was asked and answered as follows:

Q. Is there a difference in being baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and being baptized in the name of Jesus?

Ans. Jesus, in His commission, said to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but where the disciples baptized it is sometimes said they baptized in the name of the Lord or the Lord Jesus. It is not so much the formula that is used in baptizing as it is the act itself. It is not what is said that counts, but what is done. But ancient history shows that the early church used the formula given in Math. 28, and the expressions given at Acts 10 and 19 do not necessarily contradict the other. If a person has been baptized by a competent person who used the formula in Math. 28, he should not be rebaptized by someone who uses the formula, In the name of the Lord Jesus.⁴⁴

47 This answer emphasizes the trinitarian formula Jesus used in his commission to the disciples in Matthew 28. It also acknowledges that the disciples baptized sometimes in the name of the Lord or the Lord Jesus.

48 The question that if someone who had been baptized in Jesus’s name only wanted to join the church but refused to be baptized using the trinitarian formula was brought to the 22nd Assembly of 1927.

Q. Has a pastor any right to take people into the Church of God, who have been baptized in Jesus’ name and are not willing to be baptized again?”

A. I do not consider that a person is baptized at all when he follows that Jesus only theory that is going the rounds. I would not say baptized again, I would say if he is not willing to be baptized. We are not supposed to take members in the church who reject water baptism.⁴⁵

49 With this answer, A. J. Tomlinson clearly states that, for him, baptism in Jesus’s name was not baptism at all, and that for him, this was not a new doctrine but a “theory.” Stating “I

⁴³ BDP Report, 100th International Assembly 2018, *Ministry Policy Manual* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 2018), 153.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 1917, 43.

⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Assembly of the Church of God*, 1927, 46.

would not say baptized again,” he acknowledges that the previous baptism “in Jesus’ name” was not a valid one. If that person refused to be baptized again, that meant that he could not be received into the fellowship of the church.

50 Two more questions regarding the same issue came up during the 30th Assembly. The first question was

Q. When a person has been baptized in Jesus’ name shall we fellowship him in the Church of God before he is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?

A. Baptism is not the door into the Church. The “baptized in Jesus name” as practiced by this modern movement is not recognized by the Church of God as any baptism. One could be accepted into the Church with the understanding that he would be baptized at the first opportunity. No one should be let go along indefinitely as a member without being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁴⁶

The second question was recorded as follows:

Q. Why did the disciples baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus?

A. In the name of, often means, by the authority of—Jesus gave them the authority to baptize. They baptized because He commanded them to do so, and in baptizing in the name of the Lord Jesus was giving the person’s name who gave them the authority. This was to distinguish from John’s baptism.⁴⁷

51 A. J. Tomlinson’s answer to the first question reemphasized the fact that for this church, baptism was not the door into the Church. Tomlinson stated once again that the Church of God did not recognize the baptism in Jesus’s name “as practiced by this modern movement” (Oneness Pentecostalism). If someone wanted to join the Church, they had to understand that they would be baptized at the first opportunity. Both the question and the answer recognized that the Church of God used the trinitarian formula “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” as their accepted baptismal formula.

52 The answer to the second question explained that baptizing in Jesus’s name was to baptize using Jesus’s authority and to distinguish it from John’s baptism.

53 These answers showing that baptism in Jesus’s name only was unacceptable are understandable since “A. J. Tomlinson rejected both the ‘finished work’ and ‘Jesus’ name’ new doctrines, remaining in the Wesleyan ‘second work’ and trinitarian traditions.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the 30th Annual Assembly of the Church of God, 1935, 70.*

⁴⁷ *Minutes of the 30th Annual Assembly, 70.*

⁴⁸ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 165.

Regarding the baptismal formula, Raymond M. Pruitt writes

The formula for water baptism was given by Jesus himself: “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Peter did not contradict this directive of the Lord when he wrote in Acts 2:38 that penitents should “be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ.” Peter was not giving a formula for baptism, but was stating that those who are baptized are baptized into Christ. They are to live wholly unto Him, living and serving in His name. Also, Peter was emphasizing to the Jews that the only way to God was through Jesus. They knew of the Jewish proselyte baptism, but Peter stressed that the only valid baptism is to be baptized into Christ. Actually, the literal meaning of Acts 2:38 is, “be baptized **on** the name of Jesus Christ.” According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, this means that the Jews were told to “repose their hope and confidence in His Messianic authority.”

The trinitarian formula signifies that those who are baptized are acknowledging that they have been immersed into spiritual communion with the Triune God. Of them it can be said, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, [is] with you” (2 Cor. 13:14).⁴⁹

M. A. Tomlinson reinforces this position declaring that

the great commission . . . outlines water baptism for the entire world. It calls for all nations to be taught that Jesus died for them. Then, after repentance and faith in Christ has made new creatures of them, they are to be baptized. This baptism must be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, exactly as set out in the command Jesus gave the disciples. Just as it is with every other point of doctrine, there is only one way to teach water baptism. This way is exactly as it is outlined in the Scripture, and nothing short of this baptism will be sufficient. No other form or ceremony will take the place of water baptism as it is outlined in the Bible.”⁵⁰

54 The reason why these questions were being brought to the Assembly is that during the period of 1914–1916, the nature of the Trinity was brought into question. Frank J. Ewart formulated his new doctrine on the baptism in Jesus’s name only stating that “there was only one personality in the Godhead—Jesus Christ—the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ being only ‘titles’ used to designate various aspects of Christ’s person.”⁵¹ Oneness Pentecostal theology “argues that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three modes or manifestations in the revelation of the one God (historically the heterodox position of modalism).”⁵²

⁴⁹ Raymond M. Pruitt, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1981, 1984), 366.

⁵⁰ M. A. Tomlinson, *Basic Bible Beliefs*, 22.

⁵¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 157.

⁵² Tony Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology: An Eternal and Unchanging Lord Powerfully Present and Active by the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: RESOURCE Publications, 2020), 54.

55 Modalism is “a view of the Trinity considered by the early church as heretical. It was believed that the one God was revealed at different times in different ways and thus has three manners (modes) of appearance rather than being one God in three Persons.”⁵³

According to modalism,

During the Incarnation, Jesus was simply God acting in one mode or role, and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was God acting in a different mode. Thus, God does not exist as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time. Rather, God is one person who has merely manifested himself in these three modes at various times. Therefore, modalism “denies the basic distinctiveness and coexistence of the three persons of the Trinity.”⁵⁴

56 The baptismal formula caused a division within the Pentecostal Movement. Those adhering to the trinitarian formula did not consider baptism in Jesus’s name only valid, and those of the “new issue” did not consider baptism using the trinitarian formula valid either. For Ewart, “anyone who was baptized in the name of ‘the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,’ was not truly baptized at all and was in error.” For him, “to be completely saved, the gift of tongues was essential,” and “the new birth, sanctification, and the baptism with the Holy Spirit with tongues constituted one event, received only in the immersion rite and only if administered in the name of Jesus.”⁵⁵

57 This statement from Ewart brings about other issues related to their doctrine of salvation. For Oneness Pentecostals, Acts 2:38 is key to their theology of the Godhead and their “three stage soteriology of repentance, water baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁶ According to Tony Richie, this interpretation presents two problems in the soteriological schema of Oneness Pentecostalism. The first one is that “it appears to result in the doctrine of baptismal regeneration,”⁵⁷ and the second is that “it excludes those who have received water baptism in the trinitarian formula or who have not experienced Spirit baptism accompanied by speaking in tongues from the new birth.”⁵⁸ For Oneness Pentecostals “only those baptized in water in the name of Jesus and baptized in the Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues are viewed as partakers of full salvation.”⁵⁹ Those who have not been baptized in Jesus’s name and spoken in

⁵³ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 176.

⁵⁴ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, 58.

⁵⁵ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 157.

⁵⁶ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, 55.

⁵⁷ Baptismal regeneration is “the belief that salvation is conferred through baptism (see John 3:5; Titus 3:5). This view has been prominent in Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism.” McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 26.

⁵⁸ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, 55.

⁵⁹ Richie, *Essentials of Pentecostal Theology*, 56.

tongues, are not. We disagree with this extreme of the Oneness Pentecostal position. We recognize that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for all believers, but salvation is provided to “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21).

Qualifications for Water Baptism

58 Historically we have faced the challenge of married women with unsaved husbands who oppose their baptism. This concern was brought to the attention of the 12th Assembly. The following question was asked:

Should a wife be subject to her husband when he objects to her being baptized and coming into the Church of God?

Answer. No rigid rule should be enforced in regard to this matter. Under some circumstances it might be best to be baptized and join the Church, while there may be other circumstances that it would be better to show respect to the desires of the husband and wait. In such cases real care should be taken, and patient waiting on God before a decision is reached. There is such a thing as a wife winning her husband by her chaste conversation and godly example.⁶⁰

59 Other questions regarding water baptism had to do with people living in fornication or adultery. The following question was asked during the 78th General Assembly of 1983:

Question: Should people be baptized in water to continue to live in fornication or adultery?

Answer: A prominent teaching of the Church is repentance. Repentance results from godly sorrow and involves both the confessing and forsaking of one’s sins. Until a person forsakes his sins it cannot be said he has truly repented, and until a person has repented he should not be baptized.⁶¹

60 Regarding the first question, we recognize the pain and the struggle that many of our sisters suffer when they are saved and are living with their unsaved husbands. The husband’s opposition to baptism must not be ignored, and going against his will could be seen as challenging his authority. There is great wisdom in the answer given to this question in 1916: “In such cases real care should be taken, and patient waiting on God before a decision is reached. There is such a thing as a wife winning her husband by her chaste conversation and godly example.” Prayer and waiting on the Lord is necessary in these cases until the Lord breaks the will of the reluctant husband.

⁶⁰ *Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 1916, 26.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the 78th Annual Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy*, 1983, 138.

61 From the answer to the second question, we can deduct that it looked like some people were being baptized in water while living together without being married. The answer brings up the teaching of repentance. Water baptism requires confessing and forsaking one's sins. Until true repentance has been achieved, the person should not be baptized. We reemphasize the biblical truth of repentance. Repentance and bearing "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8) are prerequisites of water baptism, and this include being married. We must not ignore the admonition of the Scriptures: "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers" (Hebrews 13:4).

62 There is another question that has been asked regarding people in certain areas of the world who do not have legal identification documents, and for that reason cannot get married. As a result of that, they cannot be baptized and cannot be accepted as members of the Church.

63 The Questions and Subjects Committee brought a report to the 78th General Assembly about this matter (from Section 6: Special Provision for Marriage Certification):

It has been brought to the attention of this Committee by our World Mission Department that there are certain cultures in some nations, which are considered by those nations to be inferior, to the extent that they are denied certain privileges and recognition that is important toward their eligibility for membership in the Church.

In some places the governments in power refuse to give certification to marriages in these so-called subcultures, which forces these people to remain unmarried (even according to their cultural traditions), if they desire to become members of the Church. It is the feeling of this Committee that in such situations the Church can certify these marriages which are performed in harmony with the Scriptures. We recommend that the presbytery take such action as is necessary to give relief in these situations.

In such cases couples desiring membership in the Church should appear before an authorized minister to take or reconfirm their marriage vows for proper documentation, a record of which would be maintained, both in the national office of that country and in the World Mission Department.⁶²

64 The Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee, in its document "The Biblical Institution of Marriage," addressed the subject of types of marriages. The Committee reported,

Almost all known societies operate a complex system, which involves the co-existence of different legal realms within the same national legal system, such as customary law and common law. In various parts of the world, it is common to find the indigenously based customary law existing side by side with the received law, based on that of the former colonial power. . . . The Christian church recognizes these many variations of marriage, with the exception of polygamy, free (common law) marriages, same-sex marriages, or where other elements of biblically lawful marriages have been violated.⁶³

⁶² *Minutes of the 78th Annual Assembly*, 1983, 137.

⁶³ *Minutes of the 94th International General Assembly*, 2006, 165.

65 Even though the preceding paragraphs deal with marriage rather than water baptism, they establish a principle that directly affects baptismal eligibility: namely, that a person who is not married, yet is living in a sexual relationship, remains in a state of moral impediment. Therefore, unless that situation is resolved through repentance and alignment with biblical standards (such as marriage or celibacy), the individual is not in a proper condition to receive water baptism.

66 With regard to issues arising from complex marital circumstances that prohibit water baptism, the presbytery should take actions as is necessary to give relief in these situations.

Who Can Officiate Water Baptism?

67 Several questions have been brought before past assemblies related to who is authorized to officiate water baptism.

68 During the 20th Annual Assembly of 1925, two questions regarding who can baptize were asked. The first question was recorded as follows:

Q. Has a man who is called to preach a right to baptize before he is licensed?"

A. We have no rules to prevent any one [*sic*] from baptizing without a license, but it is our custom not to do it until the license has been issued. But in case no one in authority is present and those to be baptized are satisfied, no objections would be raised. But the man should be baptized with the Holy Ghost and ought to hold license to be fully eligible for the service.⁶⁴

69 The answer to the first question made provision for baptism by an unlicensed "man" if ordained ministers were not available. The decision was left to the discretion of those being baptized. If they did not bring any objection, then they could be baptized by that man. One requirement, though, was that the man should be baptized with the Holy Spirit and ought to hold license [in the future] to be fully eligible for the service.

70 During the 100th International Assembly, the BDP Committee dealt with the issue of regions where "supplying pastors to churches in situations in which licensed ministers were in short supply or nonexistent," and where "lay ministers and those who were called into ministry, but not yet licensed, have sometimes been given temporary, provisional permits authorizing them to do the work of pastoral ministry (baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, conduct business, etc.)."⁶⁵

The BDP Committee recommended,

⁶⁴ *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Assembly of the Church over which A.J. Tomlinson is General Overseer*, 1925, 42.

⁶⁵ *The Journal of the 100th International Assembly 2018*, 75.

Only newly appointed lay pastors (holding valid lay minister's certificates) may be issued provisional permits authorizing them to perform pastoral duties normally reserved for licensed ministers (to baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, and moderate business conferences, etc.), when no licensed ministers are available to pastor a church.⁶⁶

71 This permit restricts the ministry of the lay minister to their local church where he/she has been appointed and will be valid for two years until licensing requirements are met. This two-year permit will not be renewed. This permit does not allow the lay minister to perform wedding ceremonies, unless the couple had been previously legally married in a civil ceremony. The lay pastor may perform a Christian ceremony to bless the marriage of that couple, if they attend his/her church. If at the end of the two years, the lay pastor has not obtained his/her permanent minister's license, he/she may continue to serve as a lay minister, but without authorization to perform the ministry of a duly licensed pastor.⁶⁷

72 In the 20th Annual Assembly of 1925, the question was asked whether it was possible for a woman to baptize.

Q. Has a woman that is acting as pastor any right to take in members and to administer the Lord's supper and feet washing?

A. As a general rule this is considered the work for the men, but in extreme cases when a man cannot be secured to attend to these matters the woman may act. The same applies to baptism, also.⁶⁸

73 In 1925, this church made provision for women administering the sacraments in the absence of an ordained minister. But women's role in ministry has been acknowledged, and the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee brought the following recommendation to the 1996 General Assembly:

We recommend that women be acknowledged in the preaching ministries of the church. Those who feel a calling on their lives will be set forth by a local church and, after meeting certain requirements within a specific time frame, will be examined by the state/national and International Offices, and be issued a minister's license. State/national leadership may place temporary restraints relative to their ministerial functions based upon cultural consideration, which would hinder the work of the gospel until full implementation can be achieved (1 Corinthians 10:23).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *The Journal of the 100th International Assembly 2018*, 76.

⁶⁷ *The Journal of the 100th International Assembly 2018*, 76.

⁶⁸ *Minutes of the 20th Annual Assembly*, 48.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the 89th Assembly*, 1996, 40.

74 With this recommendation, the Church recognized that women who are licensed ministers can officiate in the sacraments of the church. We admit that not every area of the world is open to the ministry of women, and it is wise to heed the advice of the recommendation that makes room for temporary restraints, if the work of the gospel is hindered.

The Mode of Water Baptism

75 Another question brought to the attention of the Assembly had to do with the mode of water baptism. As stated before, when the official teachings of the Church of God appeared in the August 15, 1910, edition of the *Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, the designated mode of water baptism was by immersion, listing Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:9–10, John 3:22–23, and Acts 8:36–38 as Scripture references. Candidates for the ministry were expected to be baptized by immersion.⁷⁰

76 During the 10th Assembly, a committee to counsel about the subject of water baptism was appointed. They brought the following report to the Assembly: “We recognize immersion as the Scriptural mode of water baptism.”⁷¹

77 Several years later, M. A. Tomlinson reaffirmed the official position of the Church of God of baptism by immersion:

“A glass of water is not sufficient for the purpose of baptism. A few drops of water sprinkled from the hand or poured from a vessel will not suffice. It would hardly have been necessary for John to use the Jordan River for the purpose of baptism if only a few drops of water were all that he needed. The Scripture states that Jesus came straightway up out of the water, so it is evident that He and John went down into the water the same as did Philip and the eunuch. In the days of John’s baptism and the baptisms performed by the disciples, complete immersion of the body was necessary. Since God’s plans do not change, it is logical to believe that only complete immersion can be considered water baptism today.⁷²

78 Bishop Fred Fisher, in the section “We Believe: An Affirmation of the Biblical Truth, Beliefs, and Practices of the Church of God of Prophecy” of his Address to the 94th International Assembly, made the acknowledgment of the position of the Church of God of Prophecy regarding water baptism:

We believe that water baptism, by single immersion, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is enjoined upon all who have repented and have believed in Christ as Savior and Lord, and that it is symbolic of our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.⁷³

⁷⁰ *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, August 15, 1910, 3.

⁷¹ *Echoes from the Tenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God*, 1914, 26.

⁷² M. A. Tomlinson, *Basic Bible Beliefs*, 21.

⁷³ *Minutes of the 94th International General Assembly*, 104.

79 This statement reflects our practice of baptizing by single immersion, in opposition to three immersions, one for each of the Persons of the Trinity. At the same time, our trinitarian baptismal formula is reemphasized.

80 Water baptism by immersion is reflected in the meaning of the Greek word for baptize, that is *baptidzo* from basic verb *bapto*, which means “immerse, sink, submerge, to cover completely with the element used in baptism.”

According to Raymond Pruitt,

None of the standard lexicons of the Greek language give “pour” or “sprinkle”, nor can these terms be legitimately adduced from the Greek verb. Complete immersion is the New Testament mode of baptism (Luke 16:24; John 13:26; Rev. 19:13). Twice *baptidzo* is translated “wash” and in both instances the thing washed was completely covered in water (Mark 7:4; Luke 11:38). Sprinkling does not symbolize the believer’s total participation in Christ which baptism is intended to signify.⁷⁴

81 Furthermore, baptism is a clear representation of our union with Christ and our identification with his death, burial, and resurrection. Stanley Grenz, states,

Immersion most clearly depicts what the ordinance of baptism is meant to signify, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus and the believer’s union with Christ. If baptism is an enactment of the story of Jesus and our participation in that story, then immersion is its clearest symbol. Submersion in water appropriately indicates death. And the bursting forth out of the watery grave illustrates resurrection life.⁷⁵

82 However, we must admit that there are exigent circumstances when water baptism by immersion is not possible at all. According to Ferguson, historically there were two special circumstances when immersion was not possible, and the mode used for baptism was sprinkling or pouring: “a lack of water and (more often) sickbed or deathbed conversions. Both were treated as exceptional, second choice, and undesirable alternatives.”⁷⁶ When someone is close to death and requests being baptized, we should not risk the wellbeing of that person by being strictly religious. In those extreme cases, sprinkling or pouring in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will suffice.

⁷⁴ Pruitt, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, 365.

⁷⁵ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 531.

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 858.

Should Someone Be Received as a Member of the Church Prior to Being Baptized in Water?

83 During the 79th General Assembly of 1984, the Questions and Subjects Committee reported the following (Section 1: On Water Baptism):

This committee has been asked to address the questions as to whether members should be received into the Church prior to their baptizing in water. It is a matter of deep concern that water baptism is generally receiving such little emphasis.

Jesus gave baptism special prominence in His commission to the Church: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Mark records it as follows: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15, 16).

In searching the scripture relevant to water baptism it becomes apparent that baptism followed immediately after repentance during the ministry of the Apostles. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

When Paul found certain disciples at Ephesus who had been baptized unto John’s baptism he said, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:4, 5). It was not until they were baptized that Paul laid his hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost.

In the case of Cornelius who received the Holy Ghost while Peter was preaching, the first concern of Peter was, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47, 48).

While we do not feel the Church should decree that water baptism absolutely must precede the administering of the covenant for membership, we believe this order to be highly proper in the light of the scriptural evidence concerning this ordinance.⁷⁷

84 This report from the Questions and Subjects Committee addresses the concern of receiving people as members of the Church before they are baptized in water. While the question had to do with membership in the Church, it revealed another deeper problem facing the Church—that water baptism “was generally receiving such little emphasis.” The lengthy response from the Committee reveals that both Jesus and the apostles placed special emphasis on this ordinance of the church. They reported that after they searched the Scriptures, they found out that “baptism followed immediately after repentance during the ministry of the apostles.” Even

⁷⁷ *Minutes of the 79th Annual Assembly, 1984, 124–25.*

though they did not feel that the Church should decree that water baptism absolutely must precede the administering of the covenant for membership, they believed that baptism should precede the covenant of membership, for this was aligned with the scriptural evidence concerning this ordinance.

85 We reaffirm the report of the Questions and Subjects Committee, that “in searching the scripture relevant to water baptism it becomes apparent that baptism followed immediately after repentance during the ministry of the Apostles.” It appears that delaying baptism for new converts is a problem in certain areas. It has come to the attention of this Committee that there are pastors who wait indefinitely before baptizing believers. We discourage such practice in the absence of valid reasons. We support what the Scriptures say about bearing fruit worthy of repentance, but that does not mean that we must achieve a state of perfection before being able to be baptized.

86 The Great Commission of Jesus commands us to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). According to Jesus’s commission, believers were baptized and then continued in a process of discipleship, learning all the teachings of Jesus. We must also not ignore the petition of the candidates when they request to be baptized. Delaying baptism could be a way of discouragement for new believers.

Baptism in the Context of the Local Church

87 Baptism is one of the acts of commitment of the church. Along with the other sacraments/ordinances [Lord’s Supper and Footwashing], it is considered an “oath of fidelity,” and as such, “the meaning of the sacred practices lies in their use as acts of commitment within the context of the community of Jesus’ disciples.”⁷⁸ When we are baptized, we are publicly celebrating “God’s salvation, declar[ing] our allegiance to Christ, and affirm[ing] our presence in his church.”⁷⁹

88 As such, we believe that this sacrament must be celebrated within the context of the local church community. Pastors, local leaders, parents, relatives, friends, and members of the local congregation should have the opportunity and privilege of participating in the baptism service of any of their relatives. For many years, there has been the custom of baptizing children and youth in camps. While this is a commendable practice, we believe that it deprives the people closest to the person being baptized of the opportunity to witness such a baptism. Other concerns raised by some pastors is that, in many cases, camp leaders do not know the level of maturity or the kind of life lived by those being baptized at camps. Baptism in the context of the local church adds meaning to the concept of being members of the community of God.

⁷⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 517.

⁷⁹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 511.

The Baptism of Children

89 The Church of God of Prophecy has always practiced believer's baptism. Believer's baptism is "administered only to those who make a conscious profession of Christian faith and who have reached an age of accountability (adulthood)."⁸⁰ For this reason, the Church of God of Prophecy does not practice infant baptism. Baptism requires faith, repentance, and confession of sins on the part of the candidate, something that an infant is incapable of doing.

90 However, the Church of God of Prophecy encourages the discipleship and baptism of children when they are ready to participate in that sacrament.

91 During the 98th International Assembly, the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee presented the document titled "The Value and Spiritual Life of Children." One of the recommendations of the Committee dealt with children partaking of the ordinances:

Recommendation 12. Believing children be instructed in the meaning of the sacraments (i.e. baptism and communion) and be given opportunity to participate under the guidance of church leadership and Christian parents.⁸¹

92 We believe that participation in the sacraments should be a family event, much like the Passover, where the family ate the meal together, and remembered their liberation from slavery. The children were given the opportunity to experience by themselves the meaning of the Passover. In the same way, when our children participate of the sacraments, they are made part of the story of salvation provided by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. In baptism, they are given the opportunity of union with him in his death, burial, and resurrection to a new life in Jesus.

Practical Recommendations

93 After presenting this document about the sacrament of water baptism, we prayerfully submit the following recommendations:

1. We recommend that general presbyters, national/state/regional bishops, and local pastors give the appropriate attention to water baptism. There is a need to bridge the gap between people saved and people being baptized in water, as shown in the report submitted by the Office of the Presiding Bishop to the 2024 International Assembly.
2. We recommend that baptisms be conducted in the context of the local church community, giving the opportunity to local pastors, leaders, parents, relatives, and friends to participate in that memorable ceremony. While this is our recommended practice, we recognize that exceptional circumstances may call for baptisms to be administered in alternate settings. In such cases, pastoral discernment and grace should guide the

⁸⁰ McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 25.

⁸¹ "The Value and Spiritual Life of Children," in *Journal of the 98th International Assembly*, 2014, 176.

decision, ensuring that the integrity of the sacrament is upheld, and the spiritual needs of the individual are compassionately met.

3. We recommend that pastors train and empower mature believers to help him/her administer water baptism in the context of the local church.
4. We recommend that baptism be taught as a one-time experience, except in cases where the original baptism was demonstrably invalid (e.g., performed outside the bounds of Christian faith or without genuine repentance and faith in Christ).

Conclusion to the BDP Assembly Report

94

The BDP expresses our appreciation to our leadership and constituents for your consideration of this report and participation in dialog with Christian decorum. We believe that this deliberative body of the International Assembly is to always strive to achieve the apostle Paul's admonition to the believers in Rome: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom 12:10–11 KJV).

Respectfully submitted,

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Secretary Tim Harper, PhD, DMin
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Concise Summary of Water Baptism Document

This is a concise summary of the biblical-theological meaning of water baptism based on the original document. The summary is not the document under consideration by the International Assembly. Consequently, matters of doctrine and theology as related to water baptism are derived from the original document, not from the concise summary.

1. Biblical-Theological Meaning

Christian water baptism finds its foundation in Jesus's baptism by John in the Jordan. John's baptism was one of repentance and forgiveness, signifying a break from temple-based purification rituals. Jesus's participation "to fulfill all righteousness" marked his submission to God's will and his identification with humanity's sin, anticipating his redemptive death.

2. Baptism and Forgiveness of Sins

Although Jesus was sinless, his baptism symbolized his vicarious identification with sinners (2 Corinthians 5:21). Early Christians followed his example; repentance and baptism were linked to forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Paul connected baptism with cleansing, sanctification, and justification (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5). Yet, as theologians like Andrew R. Williams and Karl Barth stress, the water itself does not cleanse; forgiveness comes from God through Christ's blood and the Spirit's power. Baptism is the outward sign of this inner divine act.

3. Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection

Baptism unites believers with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–6). Through baptism, believers die to sin and rise to new life, symbolizing freedom from sin's power. This identification calls for ethical transformation—living "in newness of life," dead to sin and alive to God. Theologians like Barth and Moo note that baptism is both a historical participation in Christ's redemptive work and a present, lived reality of transformation.

4. Anticipation of the Holy Spirit

Jesus's baptism prefigured the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; John 1:32–33). The Spirit's descent upon Jesus became the model for Christian experience: Water baptism represents spiritual regeneration and anticipates the Spirit's empowerment.

In Acts 2, repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and reception of the Spirit form one continuous experience. This connection is also seen in Acts 19 with the Ephesian disciples. Thus, baptism is both symbolic cleansing and an encounter with the Spirit's life-giving presence and mission.

Summary Statement

Water baptism is a multifaceted act of faith:

- It fulfills and continues Jesus's example and mission.
- It signifies repentance, forgiveness, and cleansing through Christ's blood and the Spirit's power.
- It unites believers with Christ's death and resurrection, calling them to a new, holy life.
- It anticipates the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In essence, baptism is not merely a ritual but a transformative participation in the redemptive work of Christ, the empowering of the Spirit, and the fellowship of God's people.

“Water Baptism in the History of the Church of God of Prophecy”

Water baptism has been a core doctrine of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) since its earliest days, officially listed among its accepted teachings in 1910. The Church has consistently practiced **baptism by immersion**, based on Matthew 28:19 and related Scriptures, as a public declaration of faith and obedience to Christ.

1. Historical Practice: One Baptism or More?

- **A. J. Tomlinson's influence:** Early leader A. J. Tomlinson underwent three baptisms (1897, 1901, 1913), which likely shaped the Church's early practice of “rebaptism”—requiring those joining from other denominations or returning from backsliding to be baptized again.
- **Rebaptism rationale:** This was supported by M. A. Tomlinson's use of Revelation 2:5 (“do the first works”), though later scholars like Daniel Tomberlin criticized this as a hermeneutical overreach. The New Testament does not teach rebaptism; repentance and restoration are sufficient (1 John 1:9; Galatians 6:1).

2. Baptismal Formula

- Early Assemblies (1913–1927) debated trinitarian vs. “Jesus’s name only” baptism.
 - The Church affirmed that
 - baptism should follow the trinitarian formula (Matthew 28:19).
 - baptism “in Jesus’s name” refers to authority, not a literal formula.
 - “Jesus’s name only” baptisms (Oneness Pentecostalism) were rejected as invalid.
 - The Church maintained orthodox Trinitarian theology, opposing modalism and affirming distinct Persons within the Godhead.
-

3. Qualifications for Baptism

- **Marital and moral issues:**
 - Wives with unsaved husbands should act with prayer and patience before baptism if it causes family conflict (1916 Assembly ruling).
 - Those living in fornication or adultery should not be baptized until they repent and forsake sin (1983 Assembly ruling).
 - **Cultural/legal challenges:**
 - In some regions where marriages are not legally recognized, the Church allows church certification of marriages to remove barriers to baptism.
-

4. Who May Administer Baptism

- Normally, only licensed ministers perform baptisms.
 - In the absence of licensed clergy, Spirit-filled lay ministers or women pastors may baptize under specific circumstances (1925 Assembly).
 - Modern policy (100th Assembly): **Provisional permits** may authorize lay pastors to baptize for up to two years when no licensed ministers are available.
 - Women are recognized as eligible for ministerial licensing and therefore can officiate baptisms where culturally appropriate (since 1996).
-

5. Mode of Baptism

- Immersion is the official and scriptural mode—symbolizing death, burial, and resurrection with Christ.
- Immersion is supported by the Greek *baptizo* (“to immerse, submerge”).
- Sprinkling or pouring is only acceptable in exceptional circumstances (e.g., lack of water or severe illness).

- Baptism is done by single immersion, not threefold, and must use the trinitarian formula.

6. Baptism and Church Membership

- Baptism is not technically the door into the Church, but early Assemblies (1983) emphasized that it should precede membership as a proper biblical order.
- Delaying baptism unnecessarily is discouraged; it should follow genuine repentance without requiring “perfection.”

7. Baptism in the Local Church Context

- Baptism is a community act of faith, expressing commitment to Christ and the Church.
- Baptism should ideally occur in the context of the local congregation so the community can witness and celebrate.

8. Baptism of Children

- The COGOP practices **believer’s baptism only**—for those old enough to confess faith and understand repentance.
- **Infant baptism** is not practiced.
- Children may be baptized once they demonstrate faith and understanding, ideally under parental and pastoral guidance (98th Assembly, 2014).

Summary of Core Positions

Topic	COGOP Position
Mode	Immersion only (single)
Formula	Trinitarian (Matthew 28:19)
Rebaptism	Historically practiced; now seen as unnecessary except in special cases
Administrator	Licensed ministers; provisional lay pastors or women ministers when needed
Candidates	Believers who repent and forsake sin
Infant baptism	Rejected; believer’s baptism only
Setting	Preferably within local church community
Membership	Baptism should precede covenant membership

Conclusion

Water baptism in the Church of God of Prophecy remains a sacred ordinance of obedience, identification with Christ, and public commitment to the community of faith. While the Church's early history shows evolving practices—particularly regarding rebaptism and the baptismal formula—the current stance is biblically grounded, trinitarian, and rooted in repentance, faith, and immersion.