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WE BELIEVE An Introduction to This Issue

Jerry C. Grubbs

Someone has wisely said that the miracle of the Church is not that it grows old but rather that it seems always to find a way to be reborn. The Church of God reformation movement is 100 years young! We have seemingly found ways to be continuously reborn.

Our heritage is rich in people and resources. During this centennial year we are all discovering some interesting and exciting things about our heritage.

One contribution to our centennial year is the "We Believe" statement which has been developed by the Anderson School of Theology faculty and staff. More than 70,000 of these now are in circulation through the publication efforts of Warner Press.¹

Why so much ado about what we believe? It is true that for the Church of God, the most important thing is not what we believe but rather how we live out our belief. We have, from the beginning, resisted a creedal stance toward truth. Truth for us is a lived reality. A. L. Byers said it well many years go when he said that this movement "does not assume to possess all the truth, but stands committed thereto, holding an open door to the entrance of any further light and truth. The spirit of the movement is to acknowledge good wherever found..."

This statement by Byers does not negate the importance of doctrinal statements or doctrinal

teaching and preaching. Neither does it promote a non-thinking stance toward belief. Doctrine is important in that we need a basis for our faith. We must have a solid foundation upon which to base moral choices and actions as we move redemptively in the world.

The 1974 consultation on doctrine reported the following affirmation:

Sound doctrine builds strong Christians. If in the Church of God, we can continue to propagate sound doctrine, spiritual stability, and social relevance, the future of the Church is assured. On the other hand, if sound doctrine is neglected, the end product will be that of immature Christians and a lack of relevance for the Church in society.... We should never settle for anything less than the truth revealed by God through the gospel. As this truth is declared, believed, and practiced, it will build strong Christians, the Church will become strong.³

President Reardon and the Anderson School of Theology faculty and staff have taken this affirmation seriously. The Centennial document "We Believe" is the result of serious reflection and writing. It is an attempt to address certain doctrinal issues which are a part of our past, present and future. It is a centennial gift to the Church of God to help build strong Christians through serious study of sound doctrine.

On the basis of circulation, the statement has been overwhelmingly received. However, the real test of the effectiveness of the statement will be how well it is used by Church of God congregations. This issue of *Centering on Ministry* is dedicated to helping congregations discover creative ways to make use of the statement in local communities.

¹Copies of the "We Believe" statement are available from Warner Press for 25¢ each or in quantities of 25 for \$5.00.

²A. L. Byers, *Birth of a Reformation* (Anderson, Indiana: The Gospel Trumpet Company, 1921), p. 20.

³Consultation on Doctrine (Report to the General Assembly of the Church of God), June 1974, p.5.

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A WORD ABOUT THE "WE BELIEVE" STATEMENT

Robert H. Reardon

This statement addresses certain timeless truths of the Christian faith and their relationship to the continuing mission of the Church of God reformation movement.

The Church of God reformation movement now comes to its 100th year. It seemed appropriate for me to ask faculty and staff members of our School of Theology to come forward with a clear and ringing statement of their present perspective on who we are as a movement, from whence we came and where we now stand. For many months Dean Barry L. Callen and his faculty have read, pondered, prayed, written, and rewritten in an attempt to discharge this assignment

with the utmost integrity. I thank them for addressing a most difficult task.

I commend this statement to Church of God pastors and laypersons and to those many Christian friends outside this movement who seek to understand us more fully. While the statement seeks to share some critical convictions, it is not intended to be creedal. Rather, it is a position paper which seeks to stimulate thought and vision by outlining the perspectives of some concerned individuals within this movement. It is a labor of love offered to the Church of God as together we seek God's guidance for the future.

ARE YOU MAKING PLANS TO ATTEND THE WORLD CONFERENCE AND INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, JUNE 20-29?

USING THE "WE BELIEVE" STATEMENT IN YOUR CENTENNIAL YEAR PREACHING

Hollis Pistole

The Centennial Celebration provides an exciting and unusual preaching opportunity in the Church of God. What an appropriate time for emphasizing some basic beliefs of the church! The Centennial "statement of conviction," developed by the faculty of Anderson School of Theology, makes an excellent guide for a series of sermons. The series could be tied in with any local historical observances of the Centennial year.

We frequently affirm with our lips what we believe, but fail to integrate that truth into a living faith. Many of our lay people are deficient in their understanding of what they believe and what the Church of God affirms. Some of this blame must be shared by contemporary preaching which seeks to minister to congregations through messages on guidance and encouragement. These are helpful, but have a short term effect and fail to lay a foundation for what we believe.

A radical difference exists between preaching today and that of the past century. The early preachers were intensely involved in proclaiming their convictions. They were strongly argumentative in their efforts to persuade people "to believe." Preaching today tends to be more diplomatic. Settled congregations in established communities have their own special needs. But "old truths for a new day" are always welcome. So we turn to our Centennial Celebration as a time for reaffirming "old truths."

At the outset you need an overview of the whole Centennial "experience" for your congregation. How will it be observed? Will copies of "We Believe" be available for the congregation? Will recognition be given to local church history? Will you be able to share with another Church of God congregation on these events? How might your preaching fit into the total picture?

A Suggested Centennial Series

With the "master plan" of the Centennial observance in mind, your interest should be focused on highlighting it through the pulpit. A series of five sermons is proposed and would follow the main themes of the booklet, "We Believe."

- 1. The First 100 Years
- 2. We Believe in a Changed Life
- 3. We Believe in a Redeemed Church
- 4. We Believe in a Spiritual Mission
- 5. We Believe in a Loving Witness

I. The First 100 Years

This sermon introduces the series with historical background. Explore the setting in which the movement began. Dr. John W. V. Smith's new book, *A Quest for Holiness and Unity*, will be most helpful here.

The sermon might lift up three general observations noted by Dr. Smith:

- 1. The new movement was related to life. It sought to bring about actual changes in church conditions and practices. D. S. Warner was deeply influenced by the emerging holiness movement and its emphasis on personal piety and changed lives.
- 2. The new movement was completely in the mainstream of historic Christianity. It was not a fringe or a pseudo-christian cult. It exalted Christ and the Word of God. Yet the early leaders did not introduce a single new doctrine. It was the emphasis on the church that became the focal point of the new movement.
- 3. The new movement was a radical type of Christianity. This radical thrust was in the attempt to restore the truth of Christianity as set forth in the New Testament. This was further evidenced in the effort to help the church become a true community of believers. A distinction was made between organizing the *church* and organizing the *work* of the church.
- H. M. Riggle noted five characteristics of the New Testament Church:
 - 1. Its unity or oneness (Eph. 1:10)
 - 2. Its holiness (Heb. 12:14)
 - 3. Its government (I Cor. 12:4-6)
 - 4. Its unchangeableness (Dan. 7:25)
 - 5. Its indestructibility (Matt. 16:18)

II. We Believe in a Changed Life

Text: Romans 5:1

Idea: Have a lay person give a three to five minute personal testimony as a part of the service.

F. G. Smith wrote: "Salvation is the grandest theme of the gospel story, which is the most important message ever delivered to man...

Isaiah predicted it (35:4)

Jesus declared it (Luke 19:10)

Paul affirmed it (I Tim. 1:15)

Peter preached it (Acts 5:31)"

- Plan of salvation is of divine origin (II Cor. 5:18)
- 2. Sinners are justified by faith
- Believers can be sanctified by the Holy Spirit
- Christians are to lead disciplined lives subject to Christ's authority

III. We Believe in a Redeemed Church

Text: Ephesians 4:3-6

Idea: Have a lay person give a three to five minute witness about the Church of God.

Earl L. Martin wrote: "In a day when the denominational concept of the church has obscured the truth of the meaning and function of the church, a clear understanding of the basic nature of the church is needed. A recognition by all Christians of the church as, most simply, the body of Christ, or family of God, and made up of all who are truly Christ's would be a long step forward in bringing the unity which Christ so sincerely prayed"

This is one of the strongest and most unique teachings of the Church of God, yet one that we still endeavor to actualize in our midst.

- 1. A community of redeemed persons
- 2. A community of divine-human partnership
- 3. A holy community
- 4. A unified community

IV. We Believe in a Spiritual Mission

Text: Luke 24:48

Idea: Have a lay person give a three to five minute witness of how evangelism touched him/ her personally.

- R. Eugene Sterner writes: "Jesus said, 'Go ye therefore...' (Matt. 28:19). This commandment comes not merely to one or two of us or to a small group within the church. It is binding upon all of us. No person and no group of persons is exempt. It demands obedience on the part of the church around the world."
 - We lift up Jesus as Lord—our reasonable service

- We consecrate our talents—our willing service
- 3. We reach out and care-our active service
- We follow holiness of life—our highest service

V. We Believe in a Loving Witness

Text: John 16:13

Idea: Have a lay person give a three to five minute witness about the hope of the church.

- C. E. Brown wrote: "... our hearts should be deeply stirred with thanksgiving to God for the marvelous things that have been accomplished, and the glorious traditions of self-sacrifice and spiritual devotion that have been set up among us by men and women who loved not their lives unto death D. S. Warner received an authentic illumination of the Spirit of God upon one of the most important truths in the whole range of revelation What D. S. Warner received was a special and gracious illumination, and he spent the rest of his life experimenting with various means and methods to make that illumination effective and fruitful...among fallible and limited members of the body of Christ, the Church.'
 - We identify through a "tough love" with all Christians
 - 2. We seek unity not of belief but of practice
 - 3. We try to exercise the gifts of the Spirit in our midst
 - 4. We look with hope to the future
 - a. the past was difficult but glorious
 - b. the present is often confused but assured
 - c. the future-"Where do we go from here?"

USING THE "WE BELIEVE" STATEMENT IN THE CHURCH'S EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY

Sherrill D. Hayes

For this centennial year of the Church of God, our congregation is using the theme, "Pride in Our Past... Faith in the Present... Hope for the Future." The statement of conviction, "We Believe", by the faculty of the Anderson School of Theology has been a helpful resource to use in implementing our theme.

When the statement was first received, I was in the midst of a thirteen week class during the Sunday church school hour for persons new to our congregation. The statement provided a helpful summary to our study. As we read it together it reminded us of the historical links in our past, reaffirmed the central theological concerns of the movement, and left us with a sense that we are a church with a significant message and on a mission today for Christ. We were impressed with the dynamic nature of the statement. We found ourselves responding, "Yes, that's right." "Yes, that's where we are." "Yes, that's the direction we want to go."

Three Ways to Study the Statement

As a Heritage Study

The statement provides a quick resource for getting inside the vision that motivated our early leaders to step out and witness to their beliefs. It identifies our historic ties to such traditions as the Anabaptists, Pietistic and Holiness Movements. It is a *stimulant* to a serious study of historical theology.

As a Study in Biblical Theology

It focuses on those theological concerns central to the movement. The "We Believe" sections are carefully supported with biblical references.

Helping Persons Clarify and Reaffirm Their Personal Faith, Beliefs, and Commitment

The statement tends to motivate persons to respond by identifying and witnessing to what they believe.

Some Opportunities for Special Studies

In Adult Church School Classes

Four sessions can be identified for use with adults:

- 1. Pioneers of a Better Way. Using the material on pages one through four. This session would lend itself to looking in a summary way at our indebtedness to the traditions of the Protestant Reformation, the Anabaptists and the free-church tradition, the Puritan-Pietistic Movement, to Arminian-Wesleyan evangelicalism, and to the holiness movement. The session should also identify the key motivations of our early leaders.
- 2. The Gospel ... Intensely Personal and Compellingly Social. Here classes could review the experiences of salvation, sanctification, discipleship, witnessing. Pages five and six would support this session.
- 3. A Vision for God's Church. In this session a biblical study could be made of the five clusters of scripture presented on pages six through eight.
- 4. Accomplishing the Christian Mission. The strength of pages eight through eleven is found in giving specific biblical instruction regarding how the church is called to and equipped for mission in today's world.

An interesting way to approach these would be to have all adult classes together with the pastor keynoting each session with a twenty minute presentation followed by twenty minutes of small group discussion, Questions for discussion could be suggested for each session. Or where a church has several adult classes the pastor could lead two or three persons from each class through a private study of the booklet and they in turn would lead their class through the study. This would provide a good opportunity for the pastor to relate to and support and encourage these teachers.

In Midweek Service

The same outline could be used for a study in the midweek service as a special "Centennial Study." Here time could be given for prayer that we might continue in the strengths of our past traditions.

Home Bible Studies at Various Times

Neighborhood Bible studies could be set up for six weeks to provide for sharing, prayer and study of the booklet. The same outline could be used. Session one should be used in getting acquainted and presenting the goals of the study. Session six could be used to pray together and seek God's will personally and for the church.

These studies could be planned as Sunday night or Midweek home services. Do not overlook evangelistic opportunities to invite friends and neighbors to the studies. Perhaps a group will want to meet during the morning hours to reach those who are not available at night.

Classes for New Converts

Persons new to the church or interested in the church would benefit from the statement. Here again it presents the historical, biblical and theological perspective of the movement. Certainly it should be included in resources given persons to introduce the church.

Youth and Young Adult Groups

The present interest of youth and young adults in biblical and theological studies makes them receptive to such a study. Older youth could use the study in a youth fellowship setting. Supporting resources could be provided to help them develop the concepts in more depth.

Our experience with the booklet is that the material is concisely and firmly presented, making it easy for persons who want to talk about it and discuss it. Among some of the concerns persons have wanted to discuss are:

- Is the statement consistent with my understanding of the historical positions of the church?
- 2. Does it adequately represent where the Church of God is today?
- 3. Would it be representative of the views of the faculties in our church related colleges?
- 4. Does it reflect the views of our local church pastors around the country?
- 5. Would there be differences in support of these statements from congregation to congregation?
- 6. How about our congregation? Does our ministry reflect these views?
- 7. Does the statement "match up" with my personal views? Where do I "strongly agree," "moderately agree," "disagree" and "disagree strongly"?

The statement can open up sharing between persons that is refreshing and call to light areas where further personal and congregational study is needed.

However the statement is used, these goals might guide you:

- that persons might have positive selfesteem feelings about the Church of God;
- that persons be able to identify the motives and beliefs of our early leaders;
- that persons might commit themselves to responding in faith (belief) and love (witness, service) as members of God's church.

One statement from the "We Believe" document suggests that today the church needs "pulsating within us the heartbeat of a majestic vision. It is a vision of the church united and on its healing and reconciling mission in today's world." It is one of our primary responsibilities as ministers to help actualize this vision.

USING THE "WE BELIEVE" STATEMENT TO SPREAD THE WORD

Paul C. Hutchins

Let's Spread the Word

In a gathering of overseas missionaries representing many different boards and nations, I was asked by a Korean missionary to Bangladesh, "What are the doctrinal emphases in your Church of God?" Facing the difficulty of responding in a social setting without getting preachy I was happy to offer a copy of "We Believe". It was graciously received and with many comments of thanks.

The genius of this booklet, that makes it instantly welcome everywhere, is that it is both profoundly simple and simply profound. My own convictions have grown stronger as I have read and re-read each well turned phrase. It carries a message to interested people totally out of proportion to its size. I hope you will put your creative thinking with mine and "spread the word" of this booklet to interested people. Your applied creative resources will carry you well beyond what is written. Here are some practical ideas:

- 1. Begin with the certainty that the positions, as stated, are truly your own, personal convictions. Read thoughtfully.
- 2. Focus on ways to share these convictions in your local congregation. For example, feature "We Believe" in a Heritage Sunday worship service. Dress in pioneer styles and emphasize Reformation songs. Emphasize the message of our heritage by making "We Believe" a gift to everyone present. If you are a pastor this would be a good way to introduce a series of sermons on the basic convictions lifted up in this booklet. Some services could be followed by a time of reflection, questions, and fellowship.
 - 3. Sunday school classes in a number of

churches have already used this booklet as a study guide.

4. If you have a "Welcome Packet" for visitors in your church be sure to include "We Believe".

Looking beyond the persons in your congregation, consider:

- 5. Keeping copies in your car, the office desk, the shop bench, and other places where you are likely to meet persons unfamiliar with the convictions that unite us.
- 6. Provide adequate supplies for your visitation teams to leave one in each new home where they visit.
- 7. Send copies to community leaders (your Mayor, Chief of Police, TV and Radio station Managers, etc.) or to church leaders in other churches with a warm letter expressing your desire to be informative in this our Centennial year.
- 8. Select a group of persons and invite them to a breakfast meeting and "spread the word" with them over a light meal.
- 9. There are so many "mail out" possibilities: i.e. neighbors living near the church, school teachers, doctors, lawyers, motel managers, barbers, etc.
- 10. Because this is the Centennial of the Church of God Reformation Movement your local religious news editor could be encouraged to print the contents of "We Believe" in your local newspaper, serially.

To "spread the word", that there is a fellowship of believers committed to the unity and holiness of God's people, will bring joy to the hearts of many, especially your own. LET'S SPREAD THE WORD.

"WE BELIEVE" A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR OUTREACH

Kenneth J. Mishler

Recently, I was sitting in my office with a young couple who had been invited to our church by one of our families. Coming from contrasting theological and doctrinal backgrounds, they wanted to know what the Church of God believes. They were very inquisitive about subjects such as: church membership, infant baptism, etc. I have always been thankful for our doctrinal stance which is strongly based upon the Word of God and I eagerly shared with them about what and why our church believes.

This is why I am so glad we now have the "We Believe" publication at the fingertips of the local

congregation. It can become a practical tool that can be used effectively in the outreach ministries of any congregation. The minister who believes the Church of God has a vital mission in getting its message out to their community could think of various ways to use this valuable brochure.

Orientation of New Believers

In a day when so many of our congregations are actively involved in witness evangelism programs, this statement of conviction can be shared with a person or persons after they have

accepted Christ, so that they can have a clear understanding of the beliefs undergirding their new church home. They can see that these are taken directly from the Bible.

Share with Visitors

An ushering staff could have a ready supply to hand out to those visitors who attend a service for the first time. This would give the pastor something to refer to when he makes his call on that home the following week.

Evangelism of Unchurched Families

One outreach program I am personally excited about for our own congregation will take place next fall. We are going to challenge every Christian family to share the "We Believe" statement with a least one unchurched family they are

acquainted with. This will also be an opportunity for our families to witness and share their own personal faith in Christ. Our goal is for every Christian family to win a new family during the next year. We are hoping that through this tool, many will see the truth in what the Church of God believes and proclaims.

In a day and age when so many are being duped by the evangelistic outreach of the many cults and mystery religions, we in the Church of God can no longer let the world go on in a dream of "it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something." Again, I am so thankful for this tool. It is not one we are planning to keep on our shelves. It is a message we want our community to hear.

USING THE "WE BELIEVE" STATEMENT IN THE CHURCH'S OUTREACH MINISTRY

James H. Rainey

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

The church's outreach ministry is that which extends beyond the doors of the building in which we assemble for worship each week. It is the cutting edge of the church's witness in the community.

While the first priority in the church's outreach is the presentation of the Gospel we must also be cognizant of the opportunities we have to share the great beliefs of the Church of God reformation movement.

The following is an attempt to identify some potential opportunities for using the statement of conviction developed by the School of Theology faculty. They are intended to be suggestions for use by pastors and lay persons alike.

Follow up of Visitors

Perhaps the most recognized opportunity is the visitor at the church worship services. Each visitor is asked to fill out a card with their name and address and place the card in the offering plate so that the church may have a record of their being present. On Monday a personal letter from the pastor is mailed to each visitor. The following week, the pastor and his wife make a personal visit to the home and present the visitor with their own copy of the statement of conviction. If the visitor was a mother, wife or teenager, the statement is presented to the father or husband. This has proven to be a great way of removing communication barriers and permitting fruitful dialogue with the family.

Hospital Visitation

Another opportunity is the hospital visit. When a member of our congregation is admitted to the hospital, almost always they are in a semi-private room. After entering the room and greeting the individual from the First Church of God, we introduce ourselves to the other patient.

After having shared in conversation regarding the other patient's spiritual condition, and having ministered to that need, we simply present the patient with their personal copy of the statement and extend an invitation to attend the services at the First Church of God.

Nursing Home Visitation

Nursing home visitation by the pastor or lay person offers tremendous opportunities to present the statement to the patients, visiting family, and interested staff.

New Converts

Each new convert is visited by both pastoral staff and lay persons and is presented a personal copy of the statement of conviction. Some discussion of the statement for further clarification is also helpful.

Ministerial Association Meetings

Community Ministerial Association meetings are also a place where the statement may be shared with other ministers who may not have a clear understanding of the Church of God reformation movement. This could be especially significant in this our centennial year.

Visitation with Newcomers

Visits to the homes of people who have recently moved into the community are very important. We give an invitation to the worship services and present the family with a copy of the statement.

Include in Personal Mailing

The statement may also be inserted in personal letters to friends and family.

People want this statement. Its cover "says" classic and its content "says" truth. It is being received and read by those to whom it is presented. We are glad to use it at First Church of God, Gallipolis, Ohio.

Contributors To This Issue

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Back issues of $Centering \ on \ Ministry$ are now available. These will be sent upon request for 25¢ each. The following issues are available:

- #1 RESOURCES FOR THE PASTOR: Gene Mendenhall on Pastoral Care; Thomas A. Miller on Music and Worship; Dwight L. Grubbs on Church Administration; and Arlene Hall on Christian Education.
- #2 PREACHING RESOURCES FOR THE PASTOR: Hollis Pistole, Preaching from Our Heritage; Gene Newberry, Preaching on Ethical Issues; George Kufeldt, Preaching on the Old Testament; and Harold Phillips, Preaching on the New Testament.
- #3 MINISTRY WITH AGING PERSONS: Gilbert Stafford, Christian Dimensions of Aging; T. Franklin Miller, Preaching to Older Adults; Esther Bauer, Worship with Older Adults; and Ron Mabry, Resources for Ministry with Aging Persons.
- #4 WOMEN AND MINISTRY: Articles by D. Elton Trueblood, Harold Phillips, Lillie McCutcheon, Marilyn Henry, Jan Erickson-Pearson, and Helen Newell.
- #5 WE BELIEVE: Articles to help local congregations use the "We Believe" statement more creatively.

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