

= Assemblies of God USA =

The Assemblies of God USA (AG) , officially the General Council of the Assemblies of God , is a Pentecostal Christian denomination in the United States founded in 1914 during a meeting of Pentecostal ministers at Hot Springs , Arkansas . It is the U.S. branch of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship , the world 's largest Pentecostal body . With a constituency of over 3 million , the Assemblies of God was the ninth largest denomination in the United States in 2011 .

The Assemblies of God holds to a conservative , evangelical and Arminian theology as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Truths and position papers , which emphasize such core Pentecostal doctrines as the baptism in the Holy Spirit , speaking in tongues , divine healing and the Second Coming of Christ . It defines for itself a fourfold mission to evangelize , worship God , disciple believers , and show compassion .

The fellowship 's polity is a hybrid of presbyterian and congregational models . This tension between local independence and national authority is seen in the AG 's historical reluctance to refer to itself as a denomination , preferring the terms fellowship and movement . The national headquarters are in Springfield , Missouri , where the administrative and executive offices and Gospel Publishing House are located .

It maintains relationships with other Pentecostal groups at both regional and national levels through the Pentecostal / Charismatic Churches of North America and the Pentecostal World Fellowship . It is also a member of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium and the National Association of Evangelicals .

= = Beliefs = =

= = = Fundamental doctrines = = =

The central beliefs of the Assemblies of God are summarized in its Statement of Fundamental Truths . The following is a summary of these 16 non @-@ negotiable Truths :

The Bible is inspired by God and is " the infallible , authoritative rule of faith and conduct " .

There is only one true God who exists as a Trinity .

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and , as the second person of the Trinity , is God .

Man was created good by God but was separated from God through original sin .

Salvation " is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ " .

There are two ordinances . Believer 's baptism by immersion is a declaration to the world that the believer has died and been raised together with Christ , becoming a new creation . The Lord 's Supper is a symbol expressing the believer 's sharing in the divine nature of Christ , a memorial of Christ 's suffering and death , and a prophecy of Christ 's second coming .

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a separate and subsequent experience following conversion . Spirit baptism brings empowerment to live an overcoming Christian life and to be an effective witness .

Speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit .

Sanctification is , " ... an act of separation from that which is evil , and of dedication unto God . " It occurs when the believer identifies with , and has faith in , Christ in his death and resurrection . It is not believed to be a " second definite work of grace " (see Finished Work) , as in some other Pentecostal denominations , but is understood to be a process in that it requires continual yielding to the Holy Spirit .

The Church 's mission is to seek and save all who are lost in sin ; the Church is the Body of Christ and consists of all people who accept Christ , regardless of Christian denomination .

Divinely called and scripturally @-@ ordained ministers serve the Church .

Divine healing of the sick is provided for in the atonement .

The " imminent and blessed hope " of the Church is its rapture preceding the bodily return of Christ to earth .

The rapture of the Church will be followed by the visible return of Christ and his reign on earth for a

thousand years .

There will be a final judgment and eternal damnation for the " wicked dead " .

There will be future new heavens and a new earth " wherein dwelleth righteousness " .

= = = Core beliefs = = =

The AG considers salvation , baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues , divine healing and the Second Coming of Christ to be its four core beliefs .

= = = = Salvation = = = =

The Statement of Fundamental Truths states , " Man 's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God " . The Assemblies of God holds the Arminian position on salvation . While it agrees with the Calvinist position that God is sovereign , at the same time , it believes that mankind has free will ? free to accept or reject God 's gift of salvation and eternal life . Therefore , the Assemblies of God disapproves of the doctrines of double predestination and the unconditional security of the believer , which holds that once saved it is impossible for a person to be lost . Instead , the Assemblies of God believes that salvation is received and kept by faith , if faith in Christ is lost , then salvation is lost .

= = = = Baptism in the Holy Spirit = = = =

According to the Statement of Fundamental Truths , " All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek " the baptism in the Spirit . It also states , " This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church " . It is a separate experience from and occurs after salvation . This baptism gives to the receiver an " endowment of power for life and service , the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry " . There are four experiences listed in the Fundamental Truths that result from Spirit baptism : " overflowing fullness of the Spirit " , " a deepened reverence for God " , intensified consecration and dedication to God and his work , and " a more active love for Christ , for His Word and for the lost " . In addition , this experience initiates the believer in the use of spiritual gifts . The " initial physical sign " of having received this baptism is " speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance " .

Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues is a requirement for ministerial licensing and ordination . However , Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues is not a requirement for membership or participation in an Assembly of God church . An increasing minority of pastors has expressed concern that there is a lack of biblical support for the claim that Spirit baptism must always be accompanied with speaking in tongues . This concern corresponds with a decrease in the number of Assembly of God adherents reporting baptism in the Holy Spirit ; according to the AG 's Office of Statistics as of 2003 less than 50 percent of adherents had this experience . These challenges to the AG 's traditional position were noted in a 2007 report by the AG 's Spiritual Life Committee :

Yet , the distinctive doctrine that once united us has , in some circles , become a point of contention . We lament the increasing rarity of the gifts of the Spirit in our worship setting . We wonder where , in our busy church schedules , will people have an opportunity to tarry at the altars for a transforming Pentecostal experience ?

Despite these challenges , the 53rd General Council in 2009 passed a resolution reaffirming the doctrine of initial physical evidence .

= = = = Divine healing = = = =

The Assemblies of God understands divine healing to have been provided for in the atonement . Looking to scripture , such as James 5 and Isaiah 53 : 5 , the AG believes that Christians can pray for healing . Indeed , it believes scripture gives elders of the church the responsibility to pray " the

prayer of faith " over the sick . It believes God can and does heal , but believes that God is sovereign and that , whether one is healed or not , a person 's trust must be in God . It sees no conflict in trusting God for healing while receiving medical care . Healing testimonies regularly appear in the official publication , the Pentecostal Evangel , and prayer for healing and testimony commonly occur in church services .

While adamant that divine healing is a reality , the AG is not dogmatic on the subject of how one is healed . Margaret Poloma summarized this view stating , " Physical healing is not certain , automatic , or subject to formula . At the same time , it remains a tenet and practice of the Assemblies of God " . Officially , the AG rejects the view that healing is caused or influenced by " positive confession " , a belief found in prosperity theology and Word of Faith teachings . Nevertheless , these teachings have influenced some congregations .

= = = Christ 's Second Coming = = =

The Statement of Fundamental Truths articles 13 and 14 articulate the Assemblies of God 's official teaching on the return of Christ to Earth . It is a dispensationalist and premillennialist eschatology that includes the pre @-@ Tribulation rapture of the Church ? the " imminent and blessed hope " . The rapture of the Church will be followed by Christ 's visible return to earth and his reign of 1 @,@ 000 years . This millennial reign will usher in the salvation of the nation of Israel and universal peace . The Assemblies of God is specifically opposed to the theologies and practices of universal salvation , setting dates for Christ 's return , post @-@ Tribulation rapture , and amillennialism .

= = = Position statements = = =

The Assemblies of God has released statements on various issues not addressed in the Statement of Fundamental Truths . These position papers are usually written by the Doctrinal Purity Commission , a standing committee of the General Council , which reviews and responds to issues referred to it by the Executive Presbytery . Position papers are not official positions of the Assemblies of God unless recommended by the Executive Presbytery and approved by the General Council . Position statements touch on biblical , theological , and social concerns .

Abstinence from alcohol : On the consumption of alcohol , the AG calls on its members and adherents to live life @-@ styles of total abstinence (see Christianity and alcohol) .

Apostles and Prophets : The Assemblies of God does not recognize titles or offices of " apostle " and " prophet " . It does , however , believe there are those in the church who " exercise the ministry function of apostles and prophets " . Apostolic functions relate to evangelizing previously unreached areas or people groups , while prophetic functions " occur when believers speak under the anointing of the Spirit to strengthen , encourage , or comfort " . " Prophecy is a continuing gift of the Holy Spirit that is broadly distributed as the Spirit wills throughout Pentecostal churches " . Predictive prophecy that proves false , or prophecy that " departs from biblical truth " is false prophecy . The AG believes in the four ministry gifts of apostles , prophets , evangelists , and pastor / teachers (see Fivefold ministry) but notes that there are no biblical instructions for the appointment of apostles and prophets today .

Assisted suicide and abortion : Viewing all human life as sacred , the Assemblies of God opposes assisted suicide and abortion (unless it is medically confirmed that the mother 's life is in imminent , physical danger) . It believes scripture is silent on the use of contraception and therefore takes no position on this subject (see Christian views on suicide , Christianity and abortion and Christian views on contraception) .

Creation : The Assemblies of God believes that the account of creation in the book of Genesis " accurately communicates God 's creation of the heavens and the earth " and that " the New Testament treats the creation and fall of Adam and Eve as historical events " . It acknowledges that Christians will have different views on " the age of the earth , the age of humankind , and the ways in which God went about the creative processes " but urges them to " avoid divisiveness over debatable theories of creation " . It also affirms that " God reveals himself both in Scripture and the

created order " (see Creationism) .

Demon Possession : The Assemblies of God believes it is possible for people to be demon possessed and be delivered by the " power of the Spirit , and the name of Jesus " . However , it cautions against overemphasis on demonology and rejects the belief that Christians can be possessed by evil spirits .

Ministry to the disabled : The AG teaches that people with disabilities are loved by God . They should be treated with dignity and fully included in the life of the Church .

Divorce and remarriage : Officially , the AG disapproves of Christians divorcing for any cause except " fornication and adultery " . Where these circumstances exist or where a Christian has been divorced by an unbeliever (see Pauline privilege) , the AG allows " the question of remarriage to be resolved by the believer in the Light of God 's Word " . For Christians who were divorced and remarried before their conversion , it is recommended that local AG churches receive them as members . The General Council has offered this guideline for AG churches ; however , churches are free to determine their own standards of membership with the result that many local churches will admit divorced and remarried persons as members even if the above conditions are not met (see Christian views on divorce) .

Gambling : The AG opposes gambling , believing that it is a disregard of responsible stewardship , involves a chance of gain at the expense and suffering of others , is inconsistent with the work ethic of scripture , and tends to be habit forming .

Homosexuality : The fellowship takes the position that the biblical ideal of marriage is between one man and one woman and that the Bible condemns all sex outside of marriage , whether heterosexual or homosexual . Furthermore , it emphasizes that " believers who struggle with homosexual temptations must be encouraged and strengthened by fellow Christians " and that believers " must hold no malice toward , or fear , of homosexuals " but " reach out in humility and compassion " (see Christianity and homosexuality) .

Positive Confession : While the AG affirms that " All the blessings which God has for His people are received through faith " (including salvation , Spirit baptism , " divine preservation " , " healing and provision of material needs " , and the motivation to witness) , it rejects the teaching that faith or " positive confession " " compels God 's action " . It holds that believers must consider the totality of scripture , consider adequately the will of God , recognize that they can expect suffering in life , and recognize the sovereignty of God . It also stresses the importance of persistent prayer , as opposed to simply confessing or " claiming " the promises of God .

Women 's role in ministry : The AG affirms the ministry of women in the church and allows them to be ordained and serve in pastoral roles (see Ordination of women) .

= = Worship = =

Because of the congregational nature of the Assemblies of God , it is difficult to define a typical local church . Church identity is influenced by members ' social class , ethnicity , and musical or worship style preferences . Sociologists Margaret Poloma and John Green have categorized AG congregations into four types : traditional , evangelical , renewalist , and alternative . Traditional congregations are those that strongly identify with the AG (and Pentecostalism in general) , while encouraging " more intense experiences of the charismata , or gifts of the Holy Spirit " such as Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues . Evangelical AG congregations , the most common type , identify with the AG and Pentecostalism but " are moving (in varying degrees) away from the unique experiences that were once important markers of Pentecostal identity " . Renewalist or charismatic AG churches are those that encourage supernatural gifts of the Spirit but weakly identify with the AG or Pentecostalism . Alternative churches are those where both identity with the AG and occurrence of unique Pentecostal experiences are low ; these include churches adopting seeker @-@ sensitive and emerging church models .

Despite the diversity found in the AG , shared beliefs and values are reflected in local churches . The Assemblies of God is " experience @-@ oriented " , and the local church is where experience of the activity of the Holy Spirit will primarily occur . Regular services are usually held on Sunday

mornings and Sunday and Wednesday evenings . There is no formal liturgy or order of service ; though , many churches have a familiar routine : opening prayer , congregational and special singing , an offering , a time of intercessory prayer , a sermon , and an altar call . In the traditional and charismatic AG churches , this routine is subject to change spontaneously within a service ? possibly being interrupted by an interpretation of a message in tongues , a prophecy , a word of wisdom , or a word of knowledge ? and this change is believed to be directed by the Holy Spirit . In addition , evening services may incorporate a time of prayer for those who are seeking something from God either around the altar or in an adjacent prayer room .

During praise and worship , participants may raise their hands as an act of worship . Congregational singing is usually led by a choir or worship team . Full drum sets , a piano , an organ , and various other instruments are frequently used . The type of music sung is generally popular worship choruses , such as those by Calvary Chapel and Hillsong . Worship is often characterized as intense and enthusiastic .

Prayer features prominently in services . Services may feature moments where special prayer is offered , often with laypersons leading the prayer and the rest of the congregation audibly participating . During these corporate prayers , some may pray in tongues . While not in every service , the pastor will pray for the sick . This prayer may include the pastor anointing the sick with olive oil and with the assistance of church elders along with pastoral associates laying hands on the one seeking healing .

Architecturally , smaller churches will feature bright lighting , large windows , a simple platform with a pulpit in the center , and an altar (" a bench across the front of the church below the platform ") . Larger churches will have direct access from the balcony to the main sanctuary near the platform so that respondents to altar calls can easily come forward , a large open area in front of the platform to accommodate altar call gatherings , and the platform itself is usually large to accommodate a large choir and musical instruments . Because the Assemblies of God practice baptism by immersion , many churches will include a baptistry at the rear of the platform .

= = Structure = =

The Assemblies of God is defined in its constitution as a " cooperative fellowship " of " churches and credentialed ministers " . It has a representative form of government derived from presbyterian polity and organized in three levels of administration : congregations , district councils and the General Council . The AG has , however , elements of congregational polity , which are limited by the powers of the districts and General Council to license and discipline ordained ministers .

= = = Congregations = = =

= = = = Self @-@ governing churches = = = =

The Assemblies of God uses several classifications of congregations based on their level of local autonomy and their relationship to the General Council . Mature , fully functioning congregations are classified as " General Council affiliated churches " . These churches are " sovereign " and self @-@ governing , but in matters of doctrine local assemblies are subordinate to districts and the General Council . A church is qualified for General Council affiliated status if it :

- accepts AG doctrines ,
- adopts a standard of membership ,
- has an active voting membership of at least 20 persons ,
- adopts a governance model that prevents a pastor or governing body from " exert [ing] dictatorial control over a church " ,
- has an adequate number of spiritually qualified members to fill the offices of the church ,
- has made provision for a pastor who is a credentialed minister in good standing with the General Council .

Each local church operates according to its own bylaws and calls its own pastor . The office of pastor is equivalent to that of elder or overseer and is tasked with preaching and teaching the Word of God , in addition to conducting the day @-@ to @-@ day operations of the church . Laypersons are elected as a board of deacons to assist the pastor . A General Council affiliated church may withdraw from the Assemblies of God by a two @-@ thirds vote of the church membership .

At the request of the pastor , deacon board , or 20 percent of voting members , district officials may intervene in the internal affairs of a General Council affiliated church . If district leaders conclude that district supervision is warranted , the church will lose its status as a self @-@ governing church and revert to the status of " district affiliated assembly " until its problems are resolved . A church may also revert to district affiliated status if it no longer meets the minimum requirements for General Council membership , such as having less than 20 voting members .

= = = District affiliated and cooperative churches = = =

Local churches , sections , and district councils are able to establish new churches . A church plant may initially be classified as " district affiliated " until it meets requirements for General Council affiliation . District affiliated congregations are under the direct supervision of district officials but are encouraged to develop into fully self @-@ governing churches . In 2009 , the General Council created a new category called " parent affiliated churches " . These are either church plants or campuses of a multi @-@ site church under the supervision of a General Council affiliated " parent " church .

Existing Pentecostal churches considering affiliation with the General Council may request temporary status as a " cooperating assembly " for a term of four years before officially joining the denomination .

= = = Districts = = =

Churches are organized into sections and sections into middle judicatories called districts . The 61 districts oversee " all the ecclesial and sacerdotal activities " within their jurisdiction , which includes recommending ministers for national credentialing and mediating disputes within local congregations . There are two types of districts . Geographical districts serve areas corresponding to state boundaries , while non @-@ geographical language or ethnic districts serve a particular language or ethnic group , such as Hispanic and Samoan churches .

Districts are governed by representative bodies called district councils , which meet annually . District council membership includes all resident ministers and one lay delegate per AG church located within the district . When the district council is not in session , a district is led by a superintendent and a presbytery (board of directors) whose members are elected by and represent the sections . A presbyter " minister [s] to ministers " and " model [s] spiritual maturity and leadership " to the ministers and churches in his section .

= = = General Council = = =

At the top of this organizational framework is the biennial General Council , the highest governing body of the Assemblies of God . All ordained and licensed ministers and one delegate per Assembly of God church are entitled to attend and participate at the General Council . The size of General Council is not static but fluctuating , changing from year to year as there is no requirement that pastors attend or that churches send delegates . In general , however , there are over 3 @,@ 000 voting members .

General Council enacts legislation , credentials ministers , oversees the national and worldwide missions programs , and directs the church ' s colleges and seminary . The General Council also elects the general superintendent ? the chief executive officer of the national organization ? and other officers , such as the assistant general superintendent , general secretary , general treasurer , and the directors of U.S. and world missions . These manage the AG 's day @-@ to @-@ day

operations and work together as the Executive Leadership Team .

In between General Council sessions , approximately 300 elected representatives from the various districts and foreign mission areas meet as the General Presbytery . When the General Council is not in session , the General Presbytery acts as the official policy @-@ making body of the Assemblies of God . A 20 @-@ member Executive Presbytery , led by the Executive Leadership Team , meets bimonthly and functions as the Assemblies of God 's board of directors . Executive Presbyters are responsible to the General Presbytery and are ex officio members of that body .

= = General Superintendent = = =

The office of General Superintendent was originally known as the Chairman of the General Council , until it was changed in 1927 . The current General Superintendent of the General Council is Dr. George O. Wood . Wood 's tenure began October 8 , 2007 , when the previous General Superintendent , Dr. Thomas E. Trask stepped down after 14 years of leadership . The following is a list of General Superintendents and their tenures :

= = Clergy = =

The Assemblies of God recognizes three classifications of ministers : certified , licensed , and ordained . District councils examine candidates for all levels of ministry and recommend those qualified to the Executive Presbytery (which is the General Council 's Credentials Committee) , which has authority to issue ministerial credentials . The AG 's constitution guarantees that " formal academic achievement (diploma or degree) shall not be a requirement for credentials " , but the General Presbytery does mandate courses and examinations .

In preparation for receiving credentials , applicants must either complete correspondence courses through Global University (the AG 's distance education program) , receive training through a postsecondary institution such as a college or seminary approved by the AG , or be recommended by a district credentials committee as qualifying for credentials based on self @-@ study and ministerial experience of " substantial duration " . In addition , applicants must pass a standardized exam that tests their knowledge of the Bible , AG doctrines , and ministerial practices . After passing the exam , they are interviewed by their district 's credentials committee . If judged qualified , the district will recommend the applicant to the General Council credentials committee .

The Assemblies of God will not grant credentials to divorced and remarried persons if either partner has a former spouse living unless for specific exceptions . Exceptions include if the divorce occurred prior to an applicant 's conversion or for " scriptural causes " such as a former spouse 's marital unfaithfulness or the abandonment of a Christian by a non @-@ Christian partner (see Pauline privilege) . The Executive Presbytery has authority to issue ecclesiastical annulments in cases involving conditions that prevent " the creation of a valid marriage union " , such as fraud . Clergy are also barred from membership in secret societies .

The Assemblies also recognize a local church credential , which can be issued by a General Council affiliated church for those engaged only in local ministry , such as prison or hospital ministry . Local church credential holders may perform the ordinances of the church with the authorization of the issuing church 's senior pastor .

In 2008 , there were a total of 34 @,@ 178 Assemblies of God ministers (excluding local church credentials) . Of these , 11 @,@ 544 were senior pastors and 6 @,@ 730 were female .

= = Activities = =

= = = Missions = = =

A primary reason the General Council was formed in 1914 was to create cooperation in Pentecostal missionary work . Missions have remained a central focus of the denomination since that time . In

2009 , there were Assemblies of God churches in 213 countries and territories around the world . Missionary work outside of the United States is overseen by Assemblies of God World Missions . As of December 2009 , AG World Missions was reporting 2 @, @ 719 personnel worldwide . The agency also provides medical evangelism through HealthCare Ministries , founded in 1983 as the Medical Missions Program . This ministry provides free optical , dental , and medical care as well as evangelism . It has operated in 86 countries since its founding .

Missions in the United States are overseen by Assemblies of God U.S. Missions . Its seven departments include chaplaincy , Chi Alpha Campus Ministries , church planting , U.S. Mission America Placement Service (MAPS) , intercultural ministries , Teen Challenge , and Youth Alive . MAPS offers volunteers the opportunity to contribute to U.S. missions in several ways . One is through church construction and evangelism , and another is through short or long term missions through summer and missionary associate programs . Youth Alive oversees missionary outreach to elementary and high schools . In 2010 , U.S. Missions reported 1 @, @ 059 appointed missionaries , candidates , and spouses . The same year , it reported 542 endorsed chaplains .

= = = Ministries = = =

The following are some of the ministries and programs of the Assemblies of God USA :

Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge

Convoy of Hope

Marriage Encounter

Missionettes

Royal Rangers

Teen and Junior Bible Quiz

= = = Education = = =

In the United States , the Assemblies of God endorses 10 Bible colleges , 7 universities , and the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary . Enrollment for all AG endorsed colleges and universities was 15 @, @ 584 for 2013 .

Assemblies of God churches operate 842 Christian schools , which may have membership with the Association of Christian Teachers and Schools (ACTS) , incorporated as the Association of Assemblies of God Christian Schools in 1992 . In 2008 , there were 105 @, @ 563 students enrolled in these schools .

= = = Publishing = = =

The Assemblies of God operates Gospel Publishing House , located in Springfield , Missouri , which publishes books , curriculum , and church ministry resources primarily for Pentecostals and charismatics , but also for the general evangelical market . The Assemblies of God publishes an official weekly magazine , the Pentecostal Evangel , and Enrichment Journal , a resource for Pentecostal ministers .

= = Demographics = =

The Assemblies of God in the United States " has grown steadily during the 20th century " . In 1925 , there were just 50 @, @ 386 members in 909 churches , but by the early 1970s membership had reached 1 million . Its most rapid growth occurred from 1971 to 1984 , when the AG grew from a constituency of around 1 million to 2 million over a 13 @- @ year period . In 2011 , average Sunday morning worship attendance for all AG churches in the U.S. was 1 @, @ 872 @, @ 399 people . In the same year , the AG 's inclusive membership (includes persons of any age that identify with the AG) was 3 @, @ 041 @, @ 957 people attending 12 @, @ 595 churches . That is an increase of 0 @. @ 4 percent since 2010 .

The ethnic diversity of the American AG is increasing ; however , its constituency is still largely white . From 1990 to 2000 , there was a slight decline in white AG churches while ethnic churches , mainly Hispanic , were responsible for much of the denomination 's numerical growth . In 2010 , the AG reported 61 @. @ 1 percent of its adherents as white , 20 @. @ 4 percent as Hispanic , 9 @. @ 1 percent as black , 4 @. @ 1 percent as Asian / Pacific Islander , and 1 @. @ 6 percent as Native American . The remaining 3 @. @ 7 percent were listed as other / mixed .

The AG has created various non @-@ geographical language districts to serve immigrant communities whose primary language is not English . There are nine Spanish and two Korean language districts in addition to one each for Brazilian and German speakers . In 2009 , the language districts oversaw 2 @, @ 195 churches with a combined membership of 279 @, @ 422 .

Members are fairly well distributed across the United States . California has the largest number of members , followed by Texas and Florida . However , the states with the highest membership rates are Oklahoma , Arkansas , Alaska , Montana , and Hawaii . Growing AG congregations tend to be located in suburban areas , as opposed to urban and rural ones .

= = History = =

= = = Origin = = =

The Assemblies of God has roots in the Pentecostal revival in the early 20th century . The Pentecostal aspects of the revival were not generally welcomed by the established churches , and participants in the movement soon found themselves outside existing religious bodies . They were forced to seek their own places of worship , and soon there were hundreds of distinctly Pentecostal congregations .

After Charles Parham began promoting the idea that speaking in tongues was the initial evidence of the baptism in the Spirit around 1901 , he began to attract a considerable following which he organized loosely as the Apostolic Faith Movement (AFM) in 1906 . However , with the rise of the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles , California , and an accusation of sodomy against him in 1907 , he lost and never recovered his influence . After renouncing Parham , the severely weakened AFM regrouped around Howard A. Goss , L. C. Hall , D. C. O. Opperman , and A. G. Canada . They were later joined by Eudorus N. Bell , previously a Southern Baptist minister . The AFM had its strength in the rural areas of Kansas , Texas , Arkansas , Oklahoma , and Missouri .

In Pentecostalism 's early years , organizational affiliation was fluid , and many ministers of the AFM , which was a white organization , were also licensed by Charles Harrison Mason 's predominantly African @-@ American Church of God in Christ . In 1907 , Goss had received a license to preach from Mason 's group , and he claimed that Mason had given him permission to issue ministerial credentials under the Churches of God in Christ name for the " white work " . By 1910 , the name " Churches of God in Christ " was seen as a more biblical name and began to be preferred over " Apostolic Faith " .

The AFM played a leading role in organizing and institutionalizing Pentecostalism in the Midwest and Southwest and from 1909 ? 1912 absorbed smaller Pentecostal groups . It also established relationships with Pentecostal missions in the Midwest . The Midwestern Pentecostal movement centered around the Stone Church , pastored by William Piper , and the North Avenue Mission , pastored by William Howard Durham , both in Chicago , Illinois . Durham was the lead promoter of the Finished Work doctrine which , in time , the AFM would adopt and in doing so discard the Wesleyan view of sanctification as a second work of grace .

Between 1906 and 1908 , the Pentecostal message had spread among Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) churches and conferences . At first , it was greeted positively by the CMA leadership , but the doctrine of initial evidence divided the organization . Former CMA Pentecostal congregations in the Midwest and Northeast were left without oversight and began associating with the Apostolic Faith Movement and the Chicago Pentecostal missions .

= = = Early history (1914 ? 1929) = = =

= = = = General Council of 1914 = = = =

By 1914 , many white ministers nominally affiliated with the Church of God in Christ had become dissatisfied with the arrangement . AFM leaders Bell , Goss , Opperman , M. M. Pinson , and A. P. Collins issued the call for a general council to " Churches of God in Christ , and to all Pentecostal or Apostolic Faith Assemblies " . What resulted was a merger of the AFM , Chicago , and CMA Pentecostals in 1914 at Hot Springs , Arkansas . The 1st General Council was attended by predominantly white representatives from 20 states and missions in Egypt and South Africa . The fellowship that emerged was incorporated as the General Council of the Assemblies of God . Bell was elected the first general superintendent . Five major reasons were given for calling the meeting :

Create unity in doctrine and in identifying Pentecostal congregations .

Develop ways to conserve the work at home and abroad .

Develop a workable system for the support of missionaries .

Charter local churches under " one Bible name " .

Discuss the possibility of a Bible training school .

Other actions taken at the 1st General Council addressed women in ministry . The Pentecostals who founded the Assemblies of God had no objections to women being engaged in ministry . The Pentecostal belief in personal experience , Spirit baptism as empowerment for service , and the need for evangelists and missionaries encouraged women to be active in all types of ministry . What concerned some Pentecostal leaders , such as Bell , were women exercising independent authority over men . The council therefore approved of the granting of credentials to female evangelists and missionaries while restricting the office of pastor to men , and it was not until 1920 that female evangelists could vote at denominational meetings . By the fall of 1914 , out of 512 credential holders , 142 were female missionaries and evangelists .

After 1914 , the Church of God in Christ would become predominantly black and the Assemblies of God would remain predominantly white . However , there were African Americans involved in the early years of the Assemblies of God . The African @-@ American pastor Garfield Thomas Haywood , for example , pastored one of the largest churches and was an influential voice within the fellowship until he withdrew from the denomination after 1916 .

= = = = " New Issue " and doctrinal clarity = = = =

The founders of the fellowship did not intend to create a denomination and originally had no creed or doctrinal statement . However , in response to several doctrinal issues , the most important being the Oneness teaching , the AG felt the need for agreement on central doctrines and to reassure evangelical Christians of its adherence to orthodox belief . Oneness Pentecostalism rejected Trinitarian theology , instead identifying the Jehovah of the Old Testament with the Christ of the New . Furthermore , Oneness adherents believed that Christians , regardless of a previous baptism , should be baptized in the name of Jesus , rather than in the name of the Trinity . By 1915 , it was adhered to by many in the fellowship , including founders such as Goss , Opperman , Hall , and Henry G. Rodgers . Other influential leaders , such as G. T. Haywood , adopted the Oneness doctrine as well .

In 1916 , the 4th General Council met in St. Louis to resolve the " new issue " . In a move that caused not a little anxiety , a committee introduced the Statement of Fundamental Truths . Oneness proponents and others saw this as an attack on the authority of the Bible , yet it was adopted along with a recommendation that AG ministers use the Trinitarian baptismal formula . Old preaching credentials were recalled and new ones issued with the Fundamental Truths included . Oneness believers , including a third of the fellowship ? s ministers , were forced to withdraw , a loss especially felt in the South where the Oneness doctrine had the most influence . A side effect of this

was a transition in leadership from former Apostolic Faith leaders , many of whom accepted the Oneness teaching , to men with Christian and Missionary Alliance backgrounds . The Oneness dissenters formed the General Assembly of the Apostolic Churches , which later merged with another group to form the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World .

Among the Fundamental Truths was a statement regarding speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism . Its inclusion was challenged by F.F. Bosworth , an executive presbyter , who argued that while for many speaking in tongues was an evidence of the baptism it was not the only evidence . The issue was decided at the General Council of September 1918 where Bosworth , who two months earlier had resigned so as not to damage the fellowship , was present and invited to address the council . Following debate two resolutions were passed which assured that initial evidence would remain an official teaching of the fellowship .

While doctrinal controversy led to the withdrawal of ministers , the fellowship experienced growth in subsequent years . District councils were organized in various regions of the country and , where these did not exist , home missionary fields were designated to maximize evangelistic efforts . In 1917 , W. Jethro Walthall led his Holiness Baptist Association of southwestern Arkansas into the Assemblies of God . District councils and missionary stations were established outside the U.S. also . By 1921 , there were districts in Canada (see Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada) , China , Japan (see Japan Assemblies of God) , India (see Assemblies of God in India) , and Egypt . Central Bible College was started in the basement of the Central Assembly of God church in Springfield , Missouri , in 1922 . In 1929 , the fellowship claimed 91 @, @ 981 members in 1 @, @ 612 churches .

== = 1930 ? 1979 == =

== = = Women and ethnic minorities == = =

Despite Pentecostalism 's origins in a racially inclusive revival , it accommodated itself to America 's culture of racial segregation rather early . The Assemblies of God was no different . As early as 1915 , an executive presbyter wrote in an article for the Pentecostal Evangel that segregation was " ordained of God " ; however , it was not until 1939 that the General Presbytery enacted a policy prohibiting the ordination of African Americans to the ministry . Districts were still allowed to license African Americans to preach but only in the district where the license was issued . Black Pentecostals seeking ordination were referred to " one of the colored organizations " . This was especially true of the Church of God in Christ , which , despite the fact that it predates the Assemblies of God , was seen as a " younger sibling " . It was not until 1962 , under the leadership of General Superintendent Thomas F. Zimmerman , that the denomination finally began issuing ordinations without regard to race . Three years later the 1965 General Council adopted a resolution affirming civil rights and condemning racism and discrimination . By the 1970s , there was renewed focus on inner @-@ city evangelism and integrated urban efforts .

While blacks were excluded from the AG until the 1960s , the denomination 's work among Spanish @-@ speaking people has a long history , first sanctioned explicitly in 1918 . Hispanic outreach became independent of the Foreign Missions Department in 1929 when the first Latin American District was established . By the end of World War II , the AG 's Latin American constituency formed the largest Protestant presence among Hispanics in the United States . The AG also focused on major European immigrant populations , but as later generations assimilated into American culture , these separate European segments were absorbed into the regular geographic districts .

During the time when African Americans were barred from ordination , women began to receive greater opportunities for leadership . Women formed an important part of the Assemblies of God 's constituency , many being Sunday School workers and evangelists , most prominent being Aimee Semple McPherson (who would later found the Foursquare Church) . This made the issue of women 's place in the movement important in the 1930s . It was also recognized that many congregations who could not afford male pastors relied on women preachers . Despite the fact that

opposition to female pastors had been regularly affirmed since 1914 , the office of pastor was opened to women in 1935 .

= = = Relations with other denominations and renewal movements = = =

Between the World Wars , the movement kept a relative isolation from other Pentecostal and evangelical groups , but after World War II , the AG started an approximation with Pentecostal groups overseas . Like the Federation of Pentecostal Churches in Germany and the Assemblies of God in Australia , at that time many national denominations came to affiliate with the U.S. fellowship . These partnerships would later develop into the World Assemblies of God Fellowship . As well as establishing fellowships in other nations , the AG also began to communicate with other U.S. churches . The Assemblies of God was a founding member of both the National Association of Evangelicals and the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (now Pentecostal / Charismatic Churches of North America) .

In the 1950s , the AG was challenged by the Latter Rain Movement , which began among former members of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada , the AG 's Canadian counterpart , and quickly spread to the United States . The " New Order " as it was known was highly critical of denominations , such as the AG , and taught that the gifts of the Spirit are channeled through church elders and are given to others by the laying on of hands . However , the Assemblies of God and other classical Pentecostal groups maintained that the charismata are not personally received or imparted but are manifested as the Holy Spirit wills . In 1949 with a meeting of the General Council approaching , there were fears that the fellowship might split over the Latter Rain issue , but in the end , the General Council was united against what were seen as the excesses of the movement . A General Council resolution specified six errors which included : imparting , identifying , bestowing , or confirming gifts by prophecy and the laying on of hands . It also rejected the idea that the Church is built on present @-@ day apostles and prophets . The Latter Rain theology of no pre @-@ tribulation rapture and the manifested sons of God teaching were condemned as heresy . The Latter Rain and the Salvation / Healing Revival of the late 1940s and 50s would be a major influence on later renewal movements .

The affiliation of the Assemblies of God with the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942 signaled the AG 's alignment with evangelicalism and its opposition to mainline Protestantism and the ecumenical movement . The AG and its evangelical partners agreed on most issues and shared similar world views though the AG 's Pentecostal distinctives ? Spirit baptism and the operation of spiritual gifts ? were not embraced by most evangelical Christians . The AG 's response then to the charismatic movement that began in the 1960s was a cautious one , affirming the move of the Holy Spirit yet urging that all revival must be judged by scripture . For the first time , beliefs and practices which had largely remained confined to the classical Pentecostal denominations began to impact mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches on a large scale . The fact that this occurred in these churches (which were historically seen by Pentecostals as suspect) , the multifaceted nature of the movement owing to the many different traditions its participants came from , and the perception by Pentecostals that the movement was based too much on experience and not on biblical teaching led some in the Assemblies of God to see it in relation to the ecumenical movement .

The charismatic movement forced a reevaluation of what it was to be Pentecostal . The Assemblies of God understood Spirit baptism in the context of baptistic evangelical theology and , by the 1950s , emphasized certain doctrines and practices as requisite for Spirit baptism . Charismatics challenged these views by claiming to receive Holy Spirit baptism outside of this context (such as remaining in liturgical churches , failing to reject sacramental theologies , and not adopting Pentecostal taboos on dancing , drinking , smoking , etc .) . On the local level , Assemblies of God churches were influenced by the charismatic movement . Some charismatics left their original churches and joined less formal Assemblies of God congregations . In addition , the contemporary decreased emphasis on traditional Pentecostal taboos in the AG is in part attributable to the charismatic movement , which accelerated a trend already in existence .

= = = Changing views on behavior , war and pacifism = = =

Since their movement 's emergence early in the 20th century , Pentecostals saw themselves as " peculiar people " , and one of the components of this identity were particular prohibitions on behavior . Prohibitions on drug use , gambling , social dancing , consuming alcohol , smoking , attending theaters , bowling , swimming in public pools and beaches , owning television sets , and restrictions on feminine attire and fashion helped distinguish Pentecostals from the larger society . Starting in the 1950s , attitudes in the Assemblies of God on many of these activities underwent dramatic change . The most change probably occurred over views on women 's attire , with the former stance against wearing make @-@ up and jewelry giving way to the acceptance of popular fashion . Most of these " holiness standards " are no longer adhered to ; however , some are still held to , such as proscriptions on smoking , alcohol and drug use .

For much of its history , the Assemblies of God officially opposed Christian participation in war and was listed by The Pacifist Handbook as America 's third largest peace church in 1940 . The official position of the church until 1967 encouraged Christian nonviolence : " We . . . are nevertheless constrained to declare we cannot conscientiously participate in war and armed resistance which involves the actual destruction of human life , since this is contrary to our view of the clear teachings of the inspired Word of God " . Most of the founders and first generation members of the denomination held to this view , and it was presented as official teaching throughout World War I and World War II . The official pacifist position remained unchanged until 1967 when the denomination affirmed " the right of each member to choose whether to declare their position as a combatant , a noncombatant , or a conscientious objector " . This was the culmination of a process begun during World War I , when it was unpopular to hold antiwar views , in which AG adherents questioned their denomination 's pacifist stance .

= = = Recent history (1980 ? present) = = =

The Assemblies of God emerged as the leading Pentecostal denomination in terms of status , wealth , influence , and global adherence . In the 1980s , the Assemblies of God saw rapid growth in the US , for several years ranking as the fastest growing American denomination . This growth was mainly the result of its Hispanic outreach (in 1988 Hispanic members made up some 15 percent of the fellowship 's total constituency) . The growth of an Asian immigrant constituency was also recognized in this decade when the first Korean district was created . The Assemblies of God gained national visibility in the late 1980s from the popularity and later scandals surrounding two of its ministers , Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker . The Assemblies of God launched an effort to increase evangelism and growth in the 1990s called the " Decade of Harvest " . Such efforts failed to sustain the impressive growth of the 1980s , however . From 2003 to 2008 , growth had slowed to an average annual increase of just over 1 percent .

With increased growth came increased acceptance and acculturation . Since the 1980s , a growing number of AG ministers have been educated and risen to leadership positions at evangelical institutions , such as Fuller Theological Seminary , Gordon @-@ Conwell , and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School . This " evangelicalization of the Assemblies of God " has led to the weakening of Pentecostal distinctives , especially the doctrine of initial evidence . Other traditional practices , such as holding prayer meetings and altar services , have faded over time as well . Despite the efforts of denominational leaders to reassert Pentecostal identity and remain more than " evangelicals plus tongues " , the process of acculturation has continued .

Even so , churches within the Assemblies of God have experienced revivals in the last two decades which featured worship and practices reminiscent of early Pentecostalism . The most prominent of these was the Brownsville Revival , which occurred at the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola , Florida , from 1995 into the early 2000s . These revivals often faced criticism from within and without the Assemblies of God for their unpredictability and the dramatic religious experiences of participants . In the case of the Brownsville Revival , the AG 's national leadership gave it

cautious approval and support .