

CHURCH *of* GOD

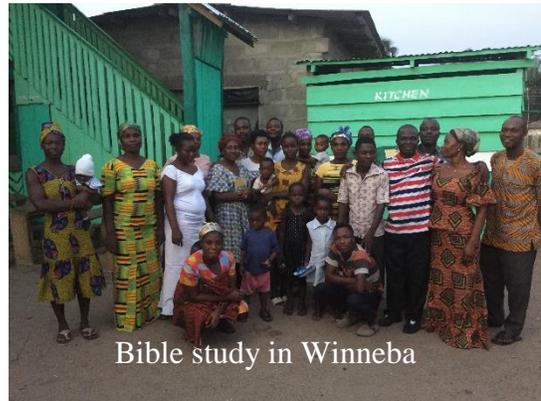
A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
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February 9, 2017

Dear Brethren,

I am writing this letter on my way home from Ghana as Tom Clark and I are finishing a 10-day trip to this West African nation where we have over 600 members and five pastors in the Church of God, a Worldwide Association. Mr. Clark, the senior pastor for Ghana, and I held Bible studies in two of the smaller areas—Kumasi and Winneba, with about 60 members in attendance. On the Sabbath of Jan. 28 we conducted two services—in the morning in Takoradi and in the afternoon in Elmina—with almost 300 brethren between the two. But in spite of our best efforts, we were only able to see approximately half of the brethren during our trip. I regret that we could not visit everyone.



My personal history with Ghana goes back about 17 years. It was in 1999 that three of us responded to a request to visit a group calling themselves the Remnant Church of God. This was a group of almost 1,500 people that had departed from the Church of God (Seventh Day). They had begun to understand the holy days (although not all were in agreement), and they were using some of the old literature from the Worldwide Church of God as a basis for their beliefs. Joel Meeker, Doug Horchak and I traveled to Ghana to assess the situation. That was the beginning of a long-term friendship that led in 2004 to several pastors being ordained to serve congregations around the country.

Since 1999, I have been to Ghana more than a dozen times, but this was the first time in more than nine years. I believe Mr. Clark mentioned that he had visited Ghana more than 30 times over the past 11 years. It is obvious that he has studied the people and the area quite thoroughly. He definitely knows the ropes and how to get around! He even gave directions to our cab drivers when they couldn't find our desired destination.

I mentioned to Mr. Clark that when I compare my first visit in 1999 to this current visit in 2017, I see tremendous progress. We knew in 1999 that not all of the 1,500 people we met would become part of the Church of God, and a number of issues did cause people to leave over the next 17 years. The holy days, the use of wine for the Passover, some of the music and dancing used at services, and public prayers where everyone prayed a different prayer out loud at the same time—these were some of the issues that separated those who wanted to be with the Church of God and those who decided to go elsewhere.

From that beginning in 1999, we now have a group of members and pastors who have been together throughout this entire period of time. And through public Bible lectures and personal contact, the Church in Ghana is growing numerically. During our visits to Ghana over the years, we have not

only visited the brethren and spoken in the congregations, but also held educational seminars for the ministry. This year I gave three classes for the pastors: 1) Expository Preaching—Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth; 2) The Importance of Integrity for the Ministry; and 3) Church Discipline—What Is It and How Should It Be Applied? In addition, Mr. Clark covered the issue of “not believing the worst of people first” and a number of necessary reporting and financial issues.

Over the past 17 years, I have visited other groups in Africa and Asia that also requested to be part of the Church of God. In most cases, it simply did not work. The differences in their teaching, doctrinal understanding and practices created stumbling blocks that prevented any sort of union. It became very clear that God’s calling and subsequent conversion is an individual matter and not something that can be done as a group.



Ghanaian pastors and wives

It is obvious that just because someone claims to be a member of the Church or claims to be a Christian doesn’t make it so. Or just because some group says its beliefs are the same as ours doesn’t make it so. By definition, a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26) who has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), strives to follow all the commandments (1 John 2:4), rejects the pagan aspects of modern “Christianity” (Sunday worship, the Trinity, holidays, idols, etc.) and embraces the biblical description of Christianity—the holy days, the Sabbath, love for the brethren, the role of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church and observance of all God’s laws.

One of the most important traits of God’s people is a love for the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10), and because of that love, Christians have a passion for this way of life. Because we love and uphold the truth, we do not consider those who practice the “Christianity” of the world to be true Christians. How can one be a true Christian and not have the truth? We have no desire to be offensive, but one simply cannot be a true Christian while ignoring the basic precepts found in the Bible. We do not claim to have perfect understanding of God’s Word (we must always be willing to change when Scripture shows us), but if we love the truth, we will do everything we can to uphold that truth.

The work in Ghana has been a success for one primary reason—our Ghanaian brethren were willing to change once convicted by the Word of God. You can’t force people to change, nor can you threaten people to make them change. When we convinced them that wine was used by Christ and the apostles at the Passover, they changed. When we convinced them that chanting prayers out loud during the service was confusion and not part of proper worship, they changed. When we convinced them that their form of music during services was inappropriate, they changed. But we had to show them from Scripture; it couldn’t just be someone’s opinion. We also knew that not everyone would agree and remain, which has been true for the past 17 years.

With Passover and Unleavened Bread fast approaching, I believe the lessons of change and love for the truth are most important, not just for our brethren in Ghana but for all of us. The more we cultivate this attitude, the more we will grow. One cannot grow without seeing his or her weaknesses and being willing to change. One cannot grow without a passion for the truth. I have been most inspired by the members in Ghana for being willing to make the changes necessary to continue growing in the truth. In a similar way, we need to examine ourselves to see if this is our attitude. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the apostle Paul admonishes all of us to examine ourselves, to look at who we are, and to ask ourselves whether we love the truth, obey the truth and are in the faith. Are we true Christians, or are we deceiving ourselves?

Before I conclude my letter, I want to give you a brief update on the status of purchasing land and building an office. As you know, last month I asked everyone to choose a day to fast to seek God's direction in this most important decision. In mid-January we made an offer on a piece of property—7.6 acres located in southern McKinney and about 10 minutes from our current office. We were recently notified that our offer was rejected by the owner, but he has presented us with a counteroffer that we are currently considering. We are looking to God to open the door that He wants for us. Please keep praying for God's intervention and, if you haven't done so already, I again ask that you set aside a day to fast between now and the Passover. We are seeking God's will in this decision and not our own.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks