



CHOG AFFIRM STATEMENT

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We deeply grieve the decision by Indiana Ministries to initiate formal misconduct investigations into ordained ministers in Indiana whose names were noted on the list of signatories of the CHOGAffirm Statement of Conviction (www.chogaffirm.com). In addition to two of the statement's authors who have been ordained for many decades with service in multiple states, we are aware of over a dozen ordained clergy who have been instructed to prepare for meetings with investigative teams authorized by Indiana Ministries' Department of Ministry Services (DMS) to investigate misconduct and potential "harm" that has come to their ministry by their signing.

The profiles of these ministers are various: some are retirees, some are young pastors on staff at churches, several are chaplains. None have been informed of any misconduct allegations from anyone involved in their practice or ministry context, only of Indiana Ministries' awareness of their name in support of CHOGAffirm's call for ministerial freedom of conscience and LGBTQ+ affirmation in the Church of God. We emphasize that none of the signers being investigated are alleged to have performed a same-sex wedding, preached LGBTQ+ affirmation from a pulpit or advocated it in a classroom. They did not violate those policies; they signed a statement urging the Church of God to change those policies. If simply suggesting the need to rethink the formulation of a doctrine is grounds for dismissal, what is being defended is not a code of ethics, but a creed.

In the cases of our two authors who have already met with investigative teams and received a summary of their reports to DMS, no questions were asked regarding any negative impact on their ability to engage in ministry, nor was any attempt made in the summary report to demonstrate such impact. (We still await DMS' judgment in those cases.)

While we and the signers who have communicated with us expected some level of official response, we are grieved and somewhat surprised by its nature. We are grieved at the legal-judicial form the investigations, communication, and reports have taken. While there have been genuine relational moments, especially between our authors and the commissioned investigative team, the process overall has been characterized by a decided lack of relationality. For many of the signers, there has been no communication from Indiana Ministries, only a form letter informing them of the charges. We are surprised at the earnestness with which Indiana Ministries has pursued this process, which is typically reserved and intended for the most extreme forms of ministerial misconduct. Other state and regional ministries have not taken this approach.

Consider, by contrast, the response to CHOGAffirm by the Church of God in Michigan. (We hold this up not to drive a wedge between state ministries but to show the range of responses by other state executives, even ones who stridently disagree with CHOGAffirm theologically.) Michigan issued a statement that, while making very clear their opposition to our call for LGBTQ+ affirmation, maintains that

It needs to also be clearly stated that The Church of God in Michigan, through its Credentials Committee, will not go out on a "witch hunt" or an "inquisition" to run people out of the ministry over this or any other issue that is prohibited by our polity. Any issue that comes to our attention will be addressed by the Credentials Manual of the Church of God (Anderson, IN).

It is striking that Indiana Ministries did not wait for any issues to come to their attention, but instead initiated charges against all the signers it could identify, even sending letters to Indiana pastors who happened to share names with completely unrelated signers on the website. This does not reflect well on the motivations, process, or relationality of the Indiana Ministries decision makers. The intent of CHOGAffirm was never to produce division, but it appears that we have exposed a form of division that was already emerging in the form of theological hard lines and punitive threats against those who cross them.

(cont.)



CHOG AFFIRM STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

When the CHOGAffirm statement was published, Indiana Ministries made clear that the statement was not one made by them and did not reflect their position. They issued a response explaining why they did not agree with the content of the statement. Church of God Ministries held a Facebook Live event on June 9, 2023, explaining what was allowed for state ministries to do and what was required.

Indiana Ministries made the deliberate decision to go beyond what was required by Church of God Ministries, and beyond what numerous other states and districts have done or pledged to do. They have, thus far, proceeded in a manner that focuses on procedure and legalism to the detriment of relationship.

By their actions, Indiana Ministries is risking multiple levels of failure. They risk failing procedurally, relationally, morally, and biblically. We have love and great respect for the individuals at Indiana Ministries, including those directly involved in this process, but they are pursuing an inappropriate format for engaging these kinds of theological questions. This legislative process is not reflective of best practices in the context of a Christian faith community, certainly not as the Church of God reformation movement has understood it.

Moreover, Indiana Ministries has promoted and linked faithfulness to a manner of biblical interpretation that diverges from the foundational beliefs of the Church of God and from the language used by the General Assembly to describe Scripture. Historically, the Church of God has consistently threaded the needle on holding that Scripture is authoritative and unfailing in achieving God's intentions, but without veering into fundamentalist doctrines of inerrancy and verbal literalism. This has historically provided a range of interpretive possibilities and laid the groundwork for the kind of theological dynamism that animated the Church of God to advance worldwide throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, even in widely divergent cultural contexts.

The approach to scriptural interpretation and application advanced by Indiana Ministries, an approach it is unjustifiably attempting to enforce, is dangerously reductive. If a state ministry office can defrock a minister for not believing that the Bible teaches that being gay is a sin, can it defrock a minister for believing that the earth is more than 10,000 years old? For believing that Moses didn't write Genesis? The entire Church of God movement should think very carefully before it goes down this road.

As of the date of the publication of this statement, we do not know the result of these misconduct investigations. They may result in nothing more than a reprimand and instruction to those being investigated. They may result in the full dismissal of a number of Church of God pastors and chaplains. But people are paying attention. There are many who agree with Indiana Ministries theologically but condemn their tactics. It is our great hope that they proceed in a mode more reflective of who the Church of God is as a movement, providing a positive witness to the watching world.

CHOGAffirm stands in support of ordained clergy in Indiana (and anywhere else they face reprisal for their willingness to affirm the LGBTQ+ community), but our work will continue after this immediate situation is resolved, whatever the result. Our mission is to ally ourselves on behalf of and with those who identify as LGBTQ+, seeking to engage practices and policies of affirmation and inclusion (advocacy, education, leadership, connectivity, and sanctuary) to bring about a culture of investment, welcome, and hospitality within the Church of God movement, and we invite anyone who shares this mission to join with us.