



## CHOG AFFIRM RESPONSE

### TO CHURCH OF GOD MINISTRIES FACEBOOK LIVE ADDRESS (JUNE 9, 2023)

#### ADDITIONAL READING:

John W. V. Smith,  
*The Quest for Holiness and Unity*,  
2nd ed., Warner Press, 2000.

Merle D. Strege,  
*I Saw the Church: The Life of the  
Church of God Told Theologically*,  
2nd ed., Warner Press, 2000.

Jerry A. Hickson,  
*Are You Sure You're Right?:  
Evangelicals and the Church of God*,  
Warner Press, 2006.

June 19, 2023

We are grateful for the time that Chair of the Credentialing Committee, Joshua Brandt, and General Director Jim Lyon took to address the movement in regard to the discussion surrounding the Chog Affirm statement and website. The emphasis on unity and the capacity for mature believers to talk through strong disagreement and coexist even where neither side is persuaded is most welcome. The official positions of the General Assembly have not changed, but this talk did implicitly acknowledge what we know to be the case: there have long been affirming voices in the Church of God and they remain free to make the case for change.

While we are distressed that a few states have taken a more confrontational position in relation to signers of the Chog Affirm statement, we are thankful for Church of God Ministries' emphasis on the role of policy and procedure in any state's investigation into credentialing matters. State credentialing boards, of course, have the authority to investigate any pastors within their jurisdiction, but must adhere to established protocols rather than engaging in punitive measures without proper justification. We are thankful for the guardrails these procedures provide, as they are an important protection for pastors and chaplains.

We also appreciate and support the General Director's recommendation to establish a task force to produce a holistic report on human sexuality and Christian sexual ethics. Jim Lyon emphasized repeatedly in his talk that this should be a holistic study, not focused solely on "the LGBTQ question," and we concur. It is vital that any such task force be deliberate in its inclusion of medical professionals, sociologists, and psychologists in addition to biblical scholars, theologians, and church historians knowledgeable about the Church of God movement and Wesleyan holiness traditions. It is equally vital that such a task force include LGBTQIA+ Christians, as well as both affirming and non-affirming perspectives. The establishment of such a task force is something that affirming voices in the Church of God movement have pressed for since before the adoption of the 1979 resolution.

Naturally, there were also points of sharp disagreement between ourselves and the views expressed in the Facebook live talk. Many of these are obvious, as Jim Lyon is non-affirming and we are affirming, and we need not go point-by-point over our disagreements on that score. However, a critical disagreement concerns the way that "Supremacy of Scripture" functions rhetorically in the discussion. The Bible has always been authoritative in the life of the Church of God Movement, but interpretation and accounts of inspiration have varied widely. Many of the core interpretive positions of Warner and his associates are effectively universally rejected by the Movement today. Within the first few decades of the Movement, figures such as A. F. Gray, H. C. Wickersham, Russell Byrum, and Otto F. Linn advanced a range of perspectives on the doctrine of inspiration and authority of scripture. Yet today throughout the Movement, reverence for Scripture is equated with a sort of inerrancy-style literalism that defies the Wesleyan tradition and the particular history of the Church of God (as well as the insights of biblical studies as an academic field). Either consciously or unconsciously, the way General Director Lyon discusses "the Supremacy of Scripture," particularly on contested issues, reinforces this equation. The authors and (even more so) the signers of the Chog Affirm statement reflect a diverse set of approaches to the Bible, as has the Church of God generally. Nevertheless, we maintain that LGBTQ affirmation is born out of following the Bible where it leads. And where it leads is where it originates: the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

Finally, we reaffirm our commitment to the LGBTQ community. We deeply regret any discouragement or emotional harm that has arisen from the discussion that has followed the publication of this statement and its various responses from state and national leaders. We acknowledge the anxiety that threats to ordained signers has provoked. We stand with you.