

Disaffiliation and Dismissal Letters

Disaffiliation and Dismissal Letters

Starting in the summer of 2005, I began a most unexpected journey. What began with questions concerning troubling developments surrounding the proposed change in General Council Bylaws relative to Ecumenism (addressed fully in my paper “When in Rome”, available along with my other position papers on our church’s website www.michianachristianembassy.com), turned into a revealing and gut-wrenching ride through the inner workings of ecclesiastical bureaucracy. My hope in this collection of correspondence is that it will speak for itself as to the systemic corruption that now exists in a once great Pentecostal fellowship that is succumbing to the historic trend towards full denominationalism; complete with an unaccountable executive that rules by subjective fiat, instead of submitting to the rule of law and Scripture.

Michigan District of the Assemblies of God November 28, 2007
31500 W 13 Mile Rd, Suite 140
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

Dear Brothers,

It is with great heaviness that, as the Pastor of Michiana Christian Embassy, I notify you that the Board of Elders, after much prayer, deliberation, and consultation with the membership, have concluded that we should remove our congregation from affiliation with the Assemblies of God denomination. This action is in accordance with our local Bylaw, Article V. Property Rights, section 4. that states,

In such case that the membership of Michiana Christian Embassy discerns that its local ministry activities are at variance with the doctrine or polity of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, the local body retains the legal right to surrender its

denominational affiliation upon the authority of a two-thirds vote of the Official Board and a three fourths (¾) vote of the membership in attendance at an Annual or Special Business Meeting.

Dating back to 1998 with our first bylaw revision, to the early days of the “Vision for Transformation” discussions held in Indianapolis (2000-2003), to the significant changes made to the District Bylaws during the Council held in Midland, that saw significant changes to the administrative structure of the District; there began to be disturbing signs of an ever-increasing trend towards full denominationalism. Then the General Council of 2005 held in Denver, Co. demonstrated that the AG was willing to cast off long-standing principles that guided the movements’ involvement with World Councils, Global movements, the Roman Catholic Church, etc., associations which would serve only to sow confusing “leaven” (Galatians 1:8; Galatians 2:3-5; Galatians 2:11) into the clear Scripturally historic message of the Pentecostal, Protestant Gospel that made the Assemblies of God great. Sadly, many of these compromises and inroads were not even revealed until they were already in place. I discussed these concerns at length in articles entitled When in Rome (2005/06), From Hot Springs to Hot Water (2006), and Passive Endorsement (2007). When in Rome and From Hot Springs to Hot Water were written with the hope of stimulating meaningful discussion amongst leadership, and were sent to all executive officers both at the District as well as General Council levels. I have enjoyed stimulating debate with Brothers Trask, Wood, and Bridges; along with scores of other believers from as far away as Canada, Scotland, England, Ireland, Italy, Venezuela, New Zealand and Australia. Unfortunately, I have never received any responses from my own District Officials. In November of 1998 we were encouraged to “not do this” via telephone by Brother Leach (with regards to changing reverter language contained in our bylaws), but never received any follow-up regarding further discussion, no requests to appear before the Presbytery, nothing. We moved ahead on the issue the next month, thus securing our ability to exercise our local sovereignty in the future. Since then I have served for five years as a Sectional Presbyter, as well as on many other committees and boards. I have never hidden my convictions from anyone, and even included a statement against term limits for Presbyters in my last devotional shared at the District Office. Nothing has ever been done under a cloak of darkness. I believe that this point is vital, and serves as a defense against any claim that our local church’s current action is sudden, impulsive, or unreasonable. It also demonstrates the sad reality that now, after nine years of debate and interaction through many different media, there is now an urgent attempt being made to persuade the leadership and congregation of Michiana Christian Embassy that leaving the Assemblies of God is a bad idea.

In the wake of these spiritual and philosophic developments, a deeper concern arose regarding the legal status of individual “autonomous assemblies”. From Hot Springs to Hot Water was written as a study of the historic progression from the AG’s early days of absolute sovereign local assemblies, to the present time where many churches do not even know that their bylaws state that they are simply using and maintaining properties in the name of the denominational corporation. In my correspondence with

National and District leaders, I was deeply grieved that we are willing to let so much pass unchallenged in the area of the spiritual life of the church in the name of “autonomy”, while at the same time rising up with passionate, almost “apostolic” indignation when

local churches exercise that same autonomy over their real estate. For example: When talking with Brothers Dave Williams, Norman Muhling, and the new CBC President Gary Denbow in the hotel restaurant following an evening service at the Conference on the Ministry in 2006, dear Brother Muhling exclaimed (after he found out I was writing to then Superintendent Trask), "Brother, you're going where angels fear to tread!" ... Why? On another occasion I spoke with Brother Jeff Kennedy about a flyer inviting our church to a "Latter Rain/Joel's Army" youth rally at one of our Assemblies on the east side of the district; a flyer containing quotes from a famous "latter rain" leader convicted of sexual perversion and alcoholism (Paul Cain). I was told, "Well, they're autonomous and we don't want to appear heavy handed; would you (meaning me) handle it for us." Also after Leith Anderson made statements at our District Council in 2006 relative to how he believed that homosexuals were "born with something they can't control", I was assured by Brother Leach that it wasn't a vital issue since Anderson doesn't hold our credential (our e-mail correspondence is recorded in Passive Endorsement). Did anyone know that when Brother George Wood was speaking at the 2007 Conference on the Ministry in Traverse City, that Benny Hinn was on his way to Brownsville for a ministry conference of his own? Superintendent Wood stated in the Sunday, November 11th edition of "Today's Pentecostal Evangel" on page 14, "I get letters from people who, by their own admission are 'watchers on the wall.' They are searching for anything wrong in the body of Christ. Quite honestly, they need to get off the wall and start witnessing to people." Instead, perhaps we need to follow the Apostle Paul's example and do both at the same time.

Paul was deeply concerned with the spiritual condition of the churches he planted, and didn't shrink back from confronting issues that threatened the purity of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 5:1-6; Acts 15:1-2). However, he didn't appear to concern himself with the financial or real estate holdings of those same local bodies (Romans 16:3-5a; Acts 20:32-35). When He wrote to the church of the Colossians, "7 All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, (Colossians 4:7-8)", It doesn't appear that he was talking about their REAL ESTATE. General Superintendent George Wood once wrote to me, "In the early days, the Movement was not concerned about such things as they had little property (From Hot Springs to Hot Water, p.28)." I can still say, as I did when I first read his words; that I completely agree with him. In fact, when doing some of my original research on the reverter clause back in 1998, I had a wonderful conversation with Brother Bruce Van Hall who, when speaking of the legal status of the great Mt. Hope Church in Lansing said, "Do you think that we would put over 8 million dollars of sweat equity in the name of the District?" The answer then was "no".
Has that changed? I truly hope not.

Unfortunately, I have also documented further conversations with Superintendent Wood that demonstrate the nature of the impasse that we now find ourselves dealing with. Brother Wood makes it very clear that any pastor or church considering the option of leaving the Assemblies of God Fellowship is already classified as an unethical minister, a betrayer, a hijacker, a wolf in sheep's clothing, or one that is interested only in building their own empire (From Hot Springs to Hot Water, pp.27-38). This sort of rhetoric creates a prejudicial environment that makes any meaningful theological or philosophical discussion nearly impossible. The time for such debate is over, and the time for decisive action on behalf of the local congregation has come.

Therefore, with all of these elements in mind, we as the leadership and members of Michiana Christian Embassy feel compelled to act at this time in order to preserve the spiritual integrity as well as the local, autonomous ownership of our church properties in the name of the corporate Embassy family. Enclosed you will find a copy of a legal opinion from our attorneys, our original articles of

incorporation dated 1946 that demonstrate that we are governed by our own Bylaws; and have followed the same. Also included is a copy of our Deed that shows that the local corporation holds clear title to all of its properties. The tapes of our private family

discussions will be forwarded when all other copies are completed for the local members. So in keeping with our local Constitution and Bylaws (Article V Property Rights. section 4, paragraph 2), we are notifying you at least two weeks in advance (from the date of this letter) of our upcoming membership meeting to be held on Sunday evening, December 16, 2007 at 6:00 PM, where we will hold our final vote in this matter. We welcome Brother Leach (or a designated representative) to come and represent the District at this meeting. A brief but reasonable window of opportunity will be given to address the congregation before the final vote (15-20 minutes, with

opportunity for follow-up questions). If any of you should desire to review the position papers or bylaws mentioned in this letter, they are all available at our website www.michianachristianembassy.com.

With deepest regrets,

Rev. Jeffrey L. Whittaker

Michael Clanton Carl Sparks

Jon Jankoviak Elmer Subera

Michael Labounty

Willis Maxwell

Richard Moore

My next communication, following the notification of the District of our special business meeting, was to clarify its precise date.

Superintendent William Leach December 4, 2007
Michigan District Council of the Assemblies of God
FAX (248) 737-3608

Dear Brother Leach,

After our telephone conversation this morning, I contacted my leadership team with the optional meeting dates that you proposed. After speaking with them, we concluded that it is still our desire to retain our original date of December 16, 2007 at 6:00 P.M.

However, after our phone conversation at approximately 3:50 P.M., we will gladly reschedule for the evening of Wednesday, December 19th at 7:00 P.M. The original date was chosen because it met with the most agreement amongst our local church family. When we selected that date, it was with a strong measure of confidence that it was before the Christmas weekend, and that it would be easier for the State Executives to adjust rather than for an entire congregation to do so. To hold the meeting on either the 23rd or the 30th, as you accurately stated in our conversation, would not be practical; and to wait until after the arrival of the New Year would not be prudent with respect to our local interests. It was not our intent to set a date that would render you unable to personally attend, but rather with the confidence that you have a strong District Executive team that could have come in your name should you have been unable to personally attend.

After our last family informational meeting held on Sunday, November 25th, 2007, and a mandate was given to the leadership by the church body to proceed, we began to craft a suitable notification letter according to the requirements of our local bylaws, Article V. Property Rights. Section 4, paragraph 2:

In such case that the membership of Michiana Christian Embassy discerns that its local ministry activities are at variance with the doctrine or polity of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, the local body retains the legal right to surrender its denominational affiliation upon the authority of a two-thirds vote of the Official Board and a three fourths ($\frac{3}{4}$) vote of the membership in

attendance at an Annual or Special Business Meeting. In such case, the local congregation will retain full title and ownership of its own real estate, buildings and all equipment necessary for the accomplishing of its missions, without making claims against any other District of General Council properties or holdings. If such action is taken, the Michigan District office of the Assemblies of God, and the entire roster of voting church membership must be notified in writing by the Pastor and Official Board two weeks prior to the membership vote, so that the District Office can be adequately represented, and the greatest possible number of voting members can be in attendance. The notification letter sent to the District Office and Church Members must include no less than three Scriptural witnesses which address the exact reason and cause of the decision to break denominational affiliation.

I want to draw your attention to the language requiring two weeks notification for this business meeting. The reason our letter of notification was sent via overnight mail on Friday (11/30), was to provide two complete working weeks for you to make all the

necessary arrangements (since the District Office is not a Church and therefore does not meet on Sundays). Ultimately, the language is there for the benefit of the local congregation, so as to provide them the best opportunity to attend. You mentioned something on the telephone that I have been pondering. When you stated that we, as a local autonomous assembly are still subject to General Council Bylaws, you raise the very essence of one of our main contentions. How can a local church, with its own bylaws legally in place and declared authoritative by its articles of incorporation, have them simply nullified by another set of bylaws in Springfield or Farmington Hills. This means that the words "local", "autonomous", and "sovereign" are merely cosmetic, and that each set of local bylaws is not worth the paper they are written on.

With all this in mind, we want to thank you again for your consideration in this matter, as we look forward to seeing you on

Wednesday, December 19th at 7:00 P.M.

On Behalf of the Official Board of Elders and Membership of Michiana Christian Embassy,

Jeffrey L. Whittaker
Jeffrey L. Whittaker, Senior Pastor

Our December 19th Business meeting proceeded, and our body legally voted to disaffiliate after listening to Superintendent Leach's appeals (in keeping with General Council Bylaw, Article VI). The very next morning I sent this letter to the Michigan District Office.

Superintendent William Leach December 20, 2007

Michigan District Council of the Assemblies of God
31500 W. Thirteen Mile Rd. Suite #140
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

Dear Brother Leach,

Based upon our 95% congregational vote of disaffiliation from the General Council of the Assemblies of God taken at our special business meeting held on Wednesday, December 19, 2007, I am writing to notify both the Michigan District and General Council Officials that as of today, December 20, 2007; I am tendering my resignation as an Assemblies of God credential holder.

Thank you once again for all you have contributed to me personally, as well as to the local congregation here in Niles. May the Lord truly bless you for that.

Thank you also for your comments at the 12/19/07 meeting, they were very helpful to many of the members who came into the evening still undecided. I trust that a copy of this letter will be forwarded (in the fashion of credential renewals) to the appropriate office in Springfield. If there is anything additional that I need to do in this regard, please notify me at my office (269-683-3518).

Sincerely,
Jeffrey L. Whittaker
Jeffrey L. Whittaker, Pastor
Michiana Christian Embassy

At this point, we at the Embassy began to put our affairs in order and move towards internal ordination of staff, and the process of investigating new affiliation for the church body. Then came the next surprising letter...

January 11, 2008

Rev. Jeff Whittaker
Michiana Christian Embassy
1922 E. Main St.
Niles, MI 49120

Dear Brother Whittaker:

Good morning and God bless you!

I'm disappointed by the vote of your congregation to withdraw from the Assemblies of God.

Your letter resigning your credential was also received; however, the Michigan District cannot accept our resignation pursuant to General Council Bylaws Article VII, Section 11., a., (2).

Your leadership in the congregation's withdrawal is cause for disciplinary action. (See General Council Bylaws Article X. Section 3., c.)

You have a right to meet with the Executive Board to discuss the charges. And, I hope you will. The next Executive Board meeting is scheduled for January 28, 2008. Please contact Lisa Nagle at the District Office for an appointment.

If you choose not to meet, the Executive Board may request the General Council Credentials Committee that you be dismissed as an Assemblies of God minister. I am very sorry it has come to this.

Brother Whittaker, in your comments to the Church Body and in your written statement to the Michigan District you expressed disappointment that you had never received any responses from your own District Officials regarding your concerns.

You were involved in extensive correspondence with Brother Trask and Brother Wood. While you copied some of the correspondence to me, it was not addressed to me. The topic of ecumenism is a national issue not a local one. Serving on the Presbytery you knew there was no involvement in Michigan (let alone the A/G corporately) with the Roman Catholic Church, World Councils, Global Movement or any other "ecumenical body". I did not join the conversation because I was not asked to, nor did I have

anything to add to Brother Wood's responses.

I did formally request that our leaders have opportunity to be a part of your informational meetings with the congregation. It was disappointing to be told we were not welcome to participate.

You have also written that in November, 1998 I encouraged you not to lead the congregation in changing the reverter language in your Bylaws, and when you did I never followed up with further discussion, nor did I request you to appear before the Presbytery.

At that time I did encourage you not to ask your congregation to change your Bylaws. I also asked you to postpone the Business Meeting and allow me to participate in the conversation. You postponed the meeting a few weeks, but did not notify or invite me to come or participate.

I didn't ask you to meet with the Presbyters because the decision to change your Bylaws was the congregation's right. At that point there was nothing to discuss. We do not bring ministers into the Presbytery every time they make a local decision we don't feel is best.

You have alleged that there are "disturbing signs of an ever-increasing trend towards full denominationalism." The fact that you weren't called into the presbytery and the District took no steps to keep the church from withdrawing other than insisting on a congregational meeting pursuant to General Council Bylaws Article VI., Section 4., d. demonstrates the opposite. Our actions clearly show we are not moving to "full denominationalism".

Brother Whittaker, your statement "after nine years of debate and interaction through many different media, there is now an urgent attempt being made to persuade the leadership and congregation of Michiana Christian Embassy that leaving the Assemblies of God is a bad idea" is unfair.

I would have been open to personally discuss concerns with you any time you asked. I didn't know we were in a debate regarding you remaining with the Assemblies of God. I was aware, of course, of your concerns regarding the Denver General Council resolutions. Leaders debate and disagree regularly without the notion that it is a conversation about leaving the Fellowship.

You also quote Jeff Kennedy in your statement. You wrote, "on another occasion I spoke with Brother Jeff Kennedy about a flyer inviting our church to a 'Latter Rain / Joel's Army' youth rally...a flyer containing quotes from a famous 'latter rain leader convicted of sexual perversion and alcoholism.'" You implied Jeff did nothing about his, which is untrue.

Jeff contacted the church and shared the concerns. The church was never associated with the group merely using some of their verbiage. The church has quoted Paul Cain not knowing his history; however, when they learned of the concerns they removed all of that language from their website and email. Jeff called you back and reported these actions.

Regarding the charge that the Assemblies of God is "willing to cast off long standing principles that guided the Movements involvement with World Councils, Global Movements, the Roman Catholic Church, etc." I reiterate Brother Wood's statement to Michiana Christian Embassy.

Over the course of the last couple of years, I have had written dialog with Pastor Jeff Whittaker regarding his concerns. Unfortunately, he has completely misunderstood the action of the 2005 General Council in regard to the participation of the Assemblies of God with the ecumenical movement. Our present bylaws specifically say: The General Council of the Assemblies of God shall not belong to any interdenominational or ecumenical organization that denies the evangelical beliefs stated in the above paragraph [inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the universality of sin, the substitutionary Atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and His second coming], and urges its ministers and churches to avoid entanglement with such interdenominational or ecumenical organizations except as opportunity may arise to support biblical values in the culture or provide opportunity to bear witness to our evangelical and Pentecostal faith and experience.

The Assemblies of God remains deeply committed to our Statement of Fundamental Truths – the first of which states that the Scriptures are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct. The Assemblies of God is not on any path to move away from the authority of God's word, the centrality of Christ, or the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We are not even one step down the road to any ecumenical path – whether it be the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, or the Roman Catholic Church. Not only are we not even one step down the road – that path has not even been thought of.

I trust this clarification is helpful to you!

George O. Wood

If you interpreted my lack of involvement in your debate with Brother Wood and Brother Trask as a lack of care and I have hurt your feelings, I apologize. Please forgive me. That was truly not my intent.

While we have always respected the right of a congregation to withdraw from the Assemblies of God the loss of fellowship and friendship is a great tragedy. As an ordained Assemblies of God minister your leadership in this matter contradicts you commitments to our Fellowship that are clearly outlined in the General Council and District Council constitution and bylaws and is heartbreaking.

Again I truly regret that we have come to this moment. I urge you to meet with the Executive Board in a spirit of reconciliation. Even now, the door is open to you and your congregation.

It is my prayer that God leads you and Michiana Christian Embassy and fulfills all of His hopes and dreams for you.

In His fellowship,

William F. Leach
William F. Leach
District Superintendent

WFL/ln

I want to address, using an e-mail sent by myself to Superintendent Leach, one vital question raised by him in the preceding letter. To leave it as it is would imply that I had misrepresented facts when I listed our church's reasons for disaffiliating. Here is the text of my e-mail.

Dear Lisa (Superintendent Leach's tireless secretary),

Please pass this note along to Brother Leach, and please make sure the copied attachment gets printed out for him as well.

Thanks so much,
Jeff

(Now begins the text of the e-mail addressing Supt. Leach's remarks)

Brother Leach,

Just a brief note to let you know that I posted a reply to your letter of 1/11/08 rejecting my resignation and requesting that I appear before the Executive. I will allow my letter to speak to that question. However, I simply wanted to clarify one other point in your communiqué. On pages 2 and 3 you stated in relation to Jeff Kennedy and the "latter rain" issue with one of our Assemblies that, "You implied Jeff did nothing about this, which is untrue. Jeff contacted the church and shared the concerns.... Jeff called you back and reported these actions." I never received, either by phone call, voice mail, or e-mail, any information telling me that Brother

Kennedy had done anything about the issue. If you have a copy of his written correspondence (electronic or otherwise) please produce it. The last comments I heard over my cell phone on the Tuesday conversation at 1:00 PM was: "If we swing and miss, can I call you back?" My answer was, "You bet Jeff, I'll do whatever I can". After that, I never heard another word. The issue I originally raised was not about Jeff's follow-up or lack thereof, but rather that his comments to me over the phone were in effect, "After talking with Brother Muhling, we decided we didn't want to appear heavy-handed, they are an autonomous Assembly"; and "Would you handle it for us?" To that I replied and emphatic "No, you're the District Youth Pastor, just call them up and share your heart, and maybe take him out for coffee and see where they are on the issue". I never even implied that there were doing anything more than, as you put it, "using some of their verbiage". Asking me to "handle it" is the very philosophic denominational/leadership issue I have been concerned with for years, just like the time I wrote to you about he comments made by Leith Anderson at our District Council in 2006. I'll keep a copy of this letter along with yours, as well as any future correspondence, so that we can avoid these unfortunate misunderstandings of the facts.

Sincerely,
Jeff Whittaker

There was no way that I could allow these distortions of what actually took place to be left unchallenged. I knew that if they were, it would cast doubts upon my veracity relative to other facts and events. You may also be interested to know that I never did receive any reply to my clarifying e-mail; either offering to provide the additional information that I had overlooked, or to admit that I was indeed correct. This fits quite naturally within the "modus operandi" of the bureaucratic machine. Here then is the official letter in which I respond both to the Districts' assertions, as well as the invitation to a trial.

Superintendent William Leach January 15, 2008
Michigan District of the Assemblies of God
31500 W.13 Mile Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI
48334

Dear Brother Leach, District Executives, Presbytery, and all others concerned,

You can imagine my surprise when I arrived at my office and found your letter amongst my morning mail. I was equally shocked when I began working my way through the text; primarily those passages declaring my leadership of the Embassy during our withdrawal illegal. Amazingly enough, my Scripture reading that morning was from Ecclesiastes 6:11 which reads in the NIV, "The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?" In keeping with this divine exhortation, I shall endeavor to keep my remarks as brief as possible. When we spoke on the telephone the week of your meetings in Frankenmuth, you stated to me in our recorded conversation... "Jeff, we're not trying to hassle you about the process of pulling out, if you... your church votes to do it, you're not going to get any hassle from us." And then during our Wednesday 12/19/07 business meeting you also stated, "...and if that's God's Will for you to leave, we'll be disappointed to be sure; but you certainly can do that..." After reading your letter, I blame myself for not knowing that I needed to secure a more precise definition of the word "you", and to whom it actually applied in both cases.

The logic that says a local Assembly has the right to exercise its sovereign self-government by withdrawing from corporate fellowship, while at the same holding it illegal for their Pastor to lead them in that direction, demonstrates once again the utter confusion created by the AG's multi-jurisdictional quagmire. It is like a man trying to watch one television program, but having to use three remote controls. For one function the local one applies, but for another, you have to use the District's, but if you want to perform yet another function, you have to use the General Council mechanism which "supersedes" them all. My resignation letter of December 20, 2007 followed Michiana Christian Embassy's legally announced and convened business meeting of Wednesday 12/19 (a meeting in fact, that was moved from its original 12/16 date out of courtesy to you). On that night, were you in possession of the knowledge of these General Council Bylaws that you have now raised in your January 11th letter? If so, why didn't you raise the subject during your appeal to the membership of the Embassy? Knowing that their corporate action would jeopardize my credentials may have persuaded them to rethink their decision. I guess it would have been moot point, and wouldn't have changed anything anyway; it's just interesting to ponder.

Something that you did say in your speech of 12/19 however, echoes back now with an incredibly ironic tone. You said, "A few years ago the Michigan District changed our Bylaws to allow the District Superintendent to become involved in a local church during crisis times. I have the responsibility to meet with the Pastor, the Board, or the church body, to help resolve issues. I also can temporarily reclassify a church, bringing it under the covering of District Leaders while health is being restored." Why didn't you exercise your right to "become involved" way back in early November of 2007 when you were first notified of the direction we were taking? Our Presbyter, Eric Jarvis, told you on Thursday 11/8 at your office, just three days after my telling him on Monday, 11/5 at our Sectional Harvest Banquet. You and I then spoke on the telephone the following Wednesday night (11/14) when you called me at my home during dinner, and I openly told you that we were holding family informational meetings from Sunday 11/11 through Sunday 11/25. It is true that I replied to your request for District representation at those meetings in the negative because: first, such "extra meetings" are not required in any copy of the multiple sets of AG Bylaws, and second, because they were private; intended only for the immediate Embassy Family. I sent you tapes of what was discussed, and told you that we would be in touch after the church had made up its mind. Following our last informational meeting on 11/25/07, our notification letter was sent to the District Office; posted on 11/28. You knew what direction we were moving in then, and yet you did not arrest my credentials under the authority of the General Council Bylaws which you now cite as grounds for rejecting my resignation. Also, why didn't you exercise your "responsibility" by intervening in a situation that was clearly a "crisis" when you first heard of our decision back on Thursday, 11/8? Our Official Business meeting was not held for approximately another six weeks after that; leaving you plenty of time to intervene. I know how the District works: a few calls to your executive team and Presbyter Board via phone poll, and you could have moved on our Assembly and "brought it under the covering of District Leaders". It is beneath both your dignity and mine for you to now insinuate that you were victimized by an uncooperative pastor and church that rushed deadlines, failed to communicate, etc. That is exactly why I wrote in our 11/28/07 notification letter, "Nothing has ever been done under a cloak of darkness. I believe that this point is vital, and serves as a defense against any claim that our local church's current action is sudden, impulsive, or unreasonable."

So now you are rushing into the proverbial emergency room to save a patient whose funeral was held three weeks ago. Your call for an executive meeting at this juncture is not offered in the spirit of collegiality and dialogue represented in your letter; but rather for the purpose of answering "charges". If a meeting to discuss ideas or to answer questions concerning the direction of our church had been called in mid November, I would have been more than willing to sit down and reason, debate, share, etc. Also, if I had refused a call to such a meeting then, I would have been guilty of insubordination and thereby would have opened a justifiable cause for your intervention and also for reclassifying the church; thereby "saving it". For thirteen years in the Michigan District, I have given of myself through serving as the Southwest Sectional Presbyter, SHARP coordinator, Honorbound Board member, etc., and have always welcomed and even pursued discussion concerning doctrine and philosophy.

On pages one and two of your 1/11/08 letter you wrote concerning my published papers, "I did not join the conversation because I was not asked to,..." I sent everything directly to your inbox, as well as to those of all our state and national executives; three of whom in Springfield gave thoughtful responses. In addition to them, I received comments from AG College Presidents, General and Executive Presbyters, and literally scores of complete strangers from across America as well as many foreign countries; none of whom were "asked to". You however, never sent one sentence of any kind; not even of mild caution or correction. Remember your words of 12/19? "A few years ago the Michigan District changed our Bylaws to allow the District Superintendent to become involved in a local church during crisis times. I have the responsibility to meet with the Pastor, the Board, or the church body, to help resolve issues. I also can temporarily reclassify a church, bringing it under the covering of District Leaders..." You can insert yourself into a sovereign Assembly and even reclassify it at your will, and yet you wouldn't answer an e-mail without being "asked to". Truly: these are thoughts worth pondering.

I have not considered myself a member of the Assemblies of God denomination (nor have I represented myself as such) since I sent my 12/20/07 resignation letter to the District Office. I still have an immense amount of respect for the dedicated foreign and home missionaries of the AG, for my former colleagues across the state and nation, and will always love my close friends in the Southwest Section. But I just cannot stomach the proposition that you now want to "posthumously" dismiss me, based upon bylaws that you chose not enforce while both I and my congregation were still "under the covering of District Leaders"; while you still claim to be the victim of a small pastor and a small church that wouldn't let you come in and save us from ourselves (you who are empowered by the "new and improved" bylaws of the Michigan District). I know that my tone has not been the most gracious, please forgive me. You have always known me to be a person that speaks from the heart as well as the mind; but I must say one last time that both your logic and your timing on this matter go beyond all credulity.

You have no doubt gathered by now that I will not be attending the January 28th tribunal at the District Office; but I am confident that you will do what you deem appropriate relative to the disposition of my credentials; and you will have the internal justification that it was because I failed to respond to a lovingly extended olive branch. With that, please allow me to quote our then Assemblies of God General Secretary, George Wood, from one of his e-mails to me in which he opined; "We'll just have to agree to disagree". To that I say, "Amen, Brother Wood, and Amen".

May God have mercy on us all; beginning with me,

Jeffrey L. Whittaker
Jeffrey L. Whittaker

I then received the next letter from the District, notifying me of their decision.

February 6, 2008

Rev. Jeff Whittaker
1334 Cass Street
Niles, MI 49120

Dear Brother Whittaker:

Good morning and God bless you!

I'm disappointed you did not meet with the Executive Board.

A motion prevailed at the Executive Board meeting of the Assemblies of God, Michigan District that we recommend to the General Council Committee that you be dismissed as an Assemblies of God minister pursuant to General Council Bylaws, Article X., Section 3., c.

May the Lord bless you richly.

In His fellowship,

William F. Leach
William F. Leach
District Superintendent

There are just a couple of points that I believe are vital to consider in connection with this letter. First of all, ARTICLE X., SECTION 3., c. states: "Any moral or ethical failure other than sexual misconduct." Our church exercised its local rights of self-government and true autonomy; both actions being legal, moral, and ethical. However, their pastor is dismissed in a punitive manner,

judged as both immoral and unethical. As I stated in my initial rebuttal of 1/15/08, the district's absolute absence of continuity and logic is ridiculous! The action was moral and ethical for the church, but not for its leader. Why do you think that there were no supporting bylaws listed in support of the final ruling? It is because they do not exist. Nowhere in the General Council bylaws, nor in the Michigan District's set, is there a statement spelling out that a credential holder will be morally charged for leading his local church in a legal action. This subjective application, after my legal resignation (while under no official investigation or charges), demonstrates the problem. Here is the first communication I received from the national office, confirming the General Council's reception of the Michigan District's "recommendation" to dismiss me.

March 10, 2008

Rev. Jeffrey L. Whittaker
1334 Cass St.
Niles, MI 49120

Dear Jeffrey:

Greetings in the name of our living and loving Lord!

The credential committee of the General Council of the Assemblies of God has received from the Michigan district council the information concerning your relationship with the Assemblies of God. This included a recommendation by the presbytery of the district that your name be shown as dismissed from the ministerial list.

The General Council Credentials Committee has concurred in the recommendation of the District and will, therefore, show our name as dismissed from the ministerial list, and also list your name accordingly in the ministers letter.

In conjunction with this action your attention is called to Article X of the General Council Bylaws, which contains provisions for termination of credential, discipline of member, and appeals.

We deeply cherish for you God's very best, knowing that

no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

May God continue to extend His grace and peace to you during this season of your life.

God Bless you!

John M. Palmer
John M. Palmer
General Secretary

JMP:lr
cc: Norman W. Muhling

Here then is my first appeal letter filed with the General Council Executive Presbytery, a body of approximately seventeen to twenty-odd men.

Office of the General Secretary of the Assemblies of God March 28, 2008
1447 North Boonville Ave.
Springfield, MO
65802-1894

Dear Secretary Palmer and Credentials Committee,

Pursuant to my reception of the General Council Credential Committee's March 10th, 2008 notification letter informing me of their confirmation of the Michigan District Council's recommendation to dismiss me as an ordained minister; and in light of the appeal period mandated by General Council Bylaw Article X, Section 10, paragraph a, I submit this simple note of request.

I am asking that you, the General Council Credentials Committee, help me to understand, using specific language contained in the General and or District Council Bylaws, the exact charges relative to my role in the departure of Michiana Christian Embassy from affiliation with the Assemblies of God. According to Article VI, Section 4, paragraph d of the General Council Bylaws:

“In the event the termination of affiliation with the General Council of the Assemblies of God is under consideration by an affiliated assembly, the pastor or board shall invite the district officers to participate in a specially called business meeting for the express purpose of giving the district officers the opportunity to present the case for continued General council affiliation. Final disposition of the matter may then proceed in accordance with the constitution and bylaws of the local church.”

I couldn't help but notice that this bylaw states that the action of terminating affiliation is to be initiated by either the local pastor or board. If this clearly defined action may be initiated (and by extension led) by the local pastor, how then can that same pastor be justly dismissed as having a “moral or ethical failure” after having followed the letter of the (Assemblies of God's) law? In fact, I was (in some fashion), inspired to organize my local church's bylaws by the “cutting edge” leadership of my District's Assistant Superintendent, Dave Williams. His great Mt. Hope Church in Lansing, at last report, still has no reverter clause and never plans to insert one. Does this make him, along with each local pastor holding to this position “Potentially Immoral and Unethical”?

Also, in the final sentence of Article VI, Section 4, paragraph d, we read: “Final disposition of the matter may then proceed in accordance with the constitution and bylaws of the local church.” Our local rules of order completely conformed to the principles of Article VI, and we followed through with them while our decision was “under consideration”. I notified my Sectional Presbyter, Eric Jarvis, of the decision of our Elder Board on Monday evening, November 5th, 2007, and he in turn notified (with my full agreement and knowledge) Michigan District Supt. William Leach on Thursday, November 8th at a regularly scheduled Presbyter meeting. I then spoke via telephone with Supt. Leach when he called me at my home on Wednesday afternoon, November 14th, and I confirmed once again that we were indeed considering leaving the AG. After three informational meetings of our congregation (meetings at which the District Office was not invited nor welcome because their attendance was not mandated by either District or local bylaws) were held on Sunday November 11th, 18th, and 25th, our local autonomous body then scheduled our special business meeting (in compliance with General Council Bylaw Article VI) for December 16th, 2007. That initial meeting date was not convenient for Supt. Leach, so our Board agreed to move it to Wednesday, December 19th, a date more agreeable to him. After Supt. Leach spoke (a tape of the meeting is available upon request), our body voted with an overwhelming majority in excess of 95% (75% being required by our local bylaws) to terminate our affiliation. On the next day, December 20th, 2007, I tendered my resignation from the Assemblies of God fellowship. Approximately three weeks later, I was notified via letter from my former District Office, that my resignation had been rejected on the grounds of General Council Bylaw Article VII, Section 11, paragraph a, subparagraph (2). After receiving that letter, I restated my position in a posted reply to the Michigan District that I considered myself a resigned minister, and therefore turned down the offer of a “post facto” hearing scheduled for January 29th, 2008. It was at that time that I became aware that the charges being leveled against me were: “A Moral or Ethical failure other than sexual misconduct” (Article X, Section 3, paragraph c). I am not appealing for reinstatement, but rather requesting that my resignation of 12/20/07 be allowed to stand, as well as requesting a precise definition (directly from the General Council Bylaws) of the charges leveled against me. Article VII, Section 11, paragraph a, subparagraph (2) states that:

“Resigned. Ministers who elect to remove themselves from the Fellowship shall submit a letter of resignation to the district with which they are affiliated. If there is no cause for disciplinary action, their resignation shall become effective after having been approved by both the district council and General council credentials committees. Their termination shall be listed in the ministers letter as resigned.”

Supt. Leach had from November 8th, 2007 to December 19th, 2007 to administratively and legislatively intervene in our situation; but he chose not to. Instead, he told our congregation during our 12/19/07 business meeting that they were fully within their rights to take the course of action they had chosen, even though it was considered regrettable and misguided by the District leadership. Additionally, as my District Pastor, why did he never appeal to me personally, either by telephone, e-mail, or letter, warning me that my current course of action would eventually lead to my dismissal as “immoral and unethical”. What he did tell me however, during a taped telephone conversation we shared in early December, “Jeff, we're not trying to hassle you about the process of pulling out, if you... your church votes to do it, you're not going to get any hassle from us.” You can understand how, after being dismissed as immoral and unethical, these proceedings could indeed very reasonably be considered a profound “hassle”, as well as vindictive in nature. If I had resigned in order to escape an embarrassing personal revelation or to avoid prosecution on some pending matter, I would completely understand the District and General Council's actions. However (in the spirit of the Apostle Paul's remarks in Philippians 3:4-7), I graduated Summa Cum Laude from North Central Bible College in 1989 where I was honored by being asked to deliver my class's commencement sermon. I have also been a faithful credential holder both in the Wisconsin/Northern Michigan and Michigan Districts, and have served as a Sectional Presbyter from 2000 to 2005, as well as having served on other boards and in various other capacities. Our local Assembly has been a leader in Honorbound, WMs, and Youth Alive participation, with some of our members and staff serving on their respective boards as well. My tithing records are open to scrutiny, and I have always strived to live above reproach in the local community in which I was raised, and in which (until 12/20/07) served as an Assemblies of God pastor for nearly 14 years. What crime then do I now stand accused of? Simply leading a local autonomous Assembly in a constitutionally defined and legal procedure, which is not prohibited anywhere within the texts of the General or District Councils' constitution and bylaws.

After having read several sets of bylaws from other fellowships and denominations, I have discovered that many of them actually have paragraphs stating that if a credential holder attempts to alienate either a congregation or their real estate from their particular “fellowship”, the church property is to be immediately seized and reclassified, and the offending pastor's credentials suspended pending an investigation. Does the Assemblies of God have such explicit language? In my repeated reviews of our documents, I have yet to find it. Perhaps this explains the brevity of my final dismissal letter from the Michigan District Office.

One final time, if I have violated the letter of Assemblies of God Bylaws in any way, please enumerate them to me in your response

letter. If you should desire to review any of my past correspondence with the Michigan District, or to read any of my position papers, they are available at: www.michianachristianembassy.com.

I prayerfully await any further light you can shed on this most vital concern,

Jeffrey L. Whittaker
Rev. Jeffrey L. Whittaker

Cc:
Michigan District Superintendent William Leach
Assistant Superintendent Dave Williams (whose Assembly, at last report, still has no reverter clause.)
Secretary/Treasurer Norman Muhling
Executive Presbyter Bradley Trask
Executive Presbyter Gordon Aiken
Executive Presbyter Jeff Hlavin
The Sectional Presbyters of the Michigan District Council

You can see at this point that I am going straight at the lack of Constitutional definition of charges. And here I am once again opening myself up by asking that all of my previous writings be examined and entered into the discussion. Under a genuine appeal, there would be a complete review of the "evidence" and "charges". Here is the first response I received from the General Council.

June 11, 2008

Dear Jeffrey:

Greetings in the name of our living and loving Lord!

At the most recent meeting of the Executive Presbytery, the following action was taken:

A Motion prevailed to deny the appeal of Jeffrey L. Whittaker that he be allowed to resign rather than be dismissed, based upon his ethical failure in leading an Assemblies of God church into a decision to pull out of the fellowship.

This decision was made after a great deal of prayerful discussion. In making this decision it was duly noted that you and your church followed the proper procedures in terminating affiliation with the General Council of the AG (Article VI, Section 4, d).

While you followed proper protocol in how you led the church to disaffiliate, the ethical failure, in the view of the General Council Credentials Committee was that you had a part in the process.

According to Article X, Section 3, c, -- "Any moral or ethical failure other than sexual misconduct" is a cause for disciplinary action. It is the thoughtful opinion of the Executive Presbytery that you acted unethically by helping to disaffiliate a local church from the AG while you were an AG minister.

Thank you for your years of ministry with the AG. I wish you well as you continue the ministry to which the Lord has called you.

The General Council bylaws do afford you the right of appeal to the General Presbytery (Article X, Section 10, c).

Sincerely,

John M. Palmer
John M. Palmer
General Secretary

cc: William F. Leach, District Superintendent, Michigan District
cc: Norman Muhling, District Secretary Treasurer, Michigan District

You will notice within the body of the above letter that both myself and Michiana Christian Embassy are recognized as following all Assemblies of God requirements for legal disaffiliation. You will also notice how the legislative provisions, as well as natural logic are set aside in order to uphold the decision to deny my request for resignation. I immediately answered; utilizing the last appeal afforded me by General Council Bylaws which was presented to the General Presbytery while they were in session in August of 2008.

I will also add here that the reader can indeed pick up on my level of frustration and disbelief with the entire ordeal.

July 1, 2008

Dear Brethren of the General Presbytery,

It is with a very weary hand and mind that I pen this final appeal. Having received Brother Palmer's letter of June 11th notifying me of the Executive Presbytery's decision, I am compelled to exhaust the last avenue afforded me by our Bylaws. It is ironic that my question relates directly to those same Bylaws with reference to seeking a clear definition of my charges. It has been made abundantly clear to me that my leadership role in the departure of Michiana Christian Embassy from the General Council of the Assemblies of God has met with your disapproval; that is to be expected by anyone of reasonable mind. However, I simply desire to reiterate my basic question that has never been adequately answered by any level of leadership in our beloved movement.

WHERE, WITHIN THE BODY OF OUR DISTRICT OR GENERAL COUNCIL BYLAWS, IS IT DEFINED AS IMMORAL OR UNETHICAL FOR A LOCAL PASTOR WHO FOLLOWS BYLAW ARTICLE VI, Section 4, paragraph "d", TO LEAD, COUNSEL, OR ADVISE A LOCAL, AUTONOMOUS ASSEMBLY IN THE ACT OF DISAFFILIATION?

I am not asking for a subjective statement of how this action makes the District and General Council Officials FEEL, but rather which AG Bylaw makes it illegal, immoral, and unethical. Brother Palmer, you wrote in your letter: While you followed proper protocol in how you led the church to disaffiliate, the ethical failure, in the view of the General Council Credentials Committee was that you had a part in the process.

"(I)n the view of the General Council Credentials Committee" is NOT equal in authority to "the view of the AG Constitution and Bylaws". By stating in Bylaw Article VI that the proper procedure for disaffiliation is that a church's "pastor or board shall invite the district officers to participate in a specially called business meeting", to then subsequently dismiss that same pastor as "immoral and unethical" for obeying the same Bylaw is beyond imagination. Your present ruling is seen by all who read it as baseless and completely subjective, and perceive your reasoning as an absolute non sequitur. In addition, using Article X to support your decision for my dismissal is a classic example of circular reasoning. Article X does not provide a legal explanation of my "alleged" moral and ethical failure, but merely labels a broad category which demands legal definition by a law explicitly describing an act as prohibited; something which the General Council Bylaws do not do in this case (as opposed to adultery, embezzlement, etc).

If you should choose to sponsor legislation at a future General Council to amend Articles VI or X to include explicit language forbidding credential holders from leading their local and autonomous churches in a legally defined action, very well; but as of today there is not one statement within our rules of order that supports this arbitrary, punitive, and libelous ruling!

Please answer this question using only accepted and approved AG Bylaws, or grant to me the resignation that true ethics, morals, and logic demand. I know you do not agree with our decision, but you must recognize the fundamental right of our local church and I to make it.

Most earnestly and sincerely,

Jeffrey L. Whittaker

On Saturday, August 16, 2008, I received a certified letter from the hand of my mail carrier. After signing for it, I sat down on the front steps of my home and slowly opened it. As I read its content, the final decision of the General Council authorities of the Assemblies of God began to sink in; I was now an "officially dismissed" minister. As I have attempted to do with all other correspondence between myself and Executives of the Assemblies of God, I will now reproduce the text of their letter followed by my own analysis and rebuttal.

August 12, 2008

Jeffrey L. Whittaker
1334 Cass Street
Niles, MI 49120

Dear Jeff:

Greetings, brother, in the name of our living and loving Lord! I trust you and your family are doing well during this beautiful summer season.

I am writing this letter in response to your appeal of dismissal that was presented to the General Presbytery of The General Council of the Assemblies of God. The Ministerial Relations Committee prayerfully and carefully examined the information regarding your

appeal. On Monday, August 11, 2008, following a presentation by the chairman of the Ministerial Relations Committee, the General Presbytery voted to uphold the decision of the Executive Presbytery to concur with the Michigan district to dismiss you as an ordained minister of The General Council of the Assemblies of God.

While I am sure you are disappointed by this decision, I trust you will find strength in knowing that God has called you to serve Him, and you are doing so in the place He has given you to serve. May you and your family and ministry continue to experience the favor and blessing of the Lord.

Blessings on you today!

Sincerely,

John M. Palmer
John M. Palmer
General Secretary

JMP:ew

cc: William F. Leach

I would now like to simply break down, paragraph by paragraph, the content of this letter, hopefully shedding more light on the mindset behind it.

First of all, one can immediately see that you are dealing with yet another denominational form letter. If the reader would examine the content of each of my denominational notifications (both State and National), it would quickly become evident that they are laced with completely inane remarks that are absolutely inappropriate when taken in the larger context of the serious subject matter. I felt as if I were reading remarks scribbled down in one of my High School yearbooks instead of an epistle of correction from spiritual overseers (“I trust you and your family are doing well during this beautiful summer season”, etc). Well frankly Brother Palmer, we are enjoying the summer, but we are also agonizing in prayer over the fact that we are continuing to be slandered by unscrupulous officials who repeatedly refuse to answer direct questions. Also in the closing paragraph (you’ll remember) I was told:

“While I am sure you are disappointed by this decision, I trust you will find strength in knowing that God has called you to serve Him, and you are doing so in the place He has given you to serve. May you and your family and ministry continue to experience the favor and blessing of the Lord.”

How can I be serving in the place God has given me to serve, when according to the General Council Executives I am immoral and unethical for leading a local autonomous church out of the denomination? Once again I am amazed at the lack of forthrightness and courage in these bureaucrats! The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:9-12:

“9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?”

I am, according to the District and General Councils, “immoral and unethical”. How can I continue to serve with the blessing of the Lord when I have stolen the local church I am now preaching in. As an immoral person I should not be greeted with “have a happy summer”, nor wished continued favor and blessings of the Lord! To demonstrate this point of inconsistency and hypocrisy further, I would now like to address another statement made by Secretary Palmer in paragraph two of his letter which reads:

“the General Presbytery voted to uphold the decision of the Executive Presbytery to concur with the Michigan district to dismiss you as an ordained minister of The General Council of the Assemblies of God.”

I have shared many conversations with good friends who are pastors of local churches in Michigan, as well as those who serve in positions of leadership within the District. I have much affection for them, and have never expected them to jeopardize their ministries on my behalf. However, I have received reports from Presbyters who attended the meeting where my charges were discussed, who were outraged at the lack of integrity and due process observed by denominational officials. When confronted about my treatment, District Superintendent William Leach (Brother-in-law to General Secretary John Palmer) said (and I paraphrase since no minutes or transcripts are available), “I don’t want to do this to Jeff, but dismissal is the only recommendation that the General Council will accept.” To this remark one presbyter is reported to have said, “Then isn’t our District’s recommendation simply cosmetic and a mockery?” To this remark there was, and still is no answer. In yet another set of conversations between District Presbyters and

Superintendent Leach, he made it perfectly clear to them that there was absolutely no scenario imaginable whereby Whittaker would be allowed to leave the fellowship with his church and still retain his good name.

That is why I am so exasperated at this entire charade that is being referred to as a true “appeal process”. There has not been one substantive response to any of my questions. There are still pastors of sizeable churches and political clout who have no reverter clauses in their local bylaws (Assistant District Superintendent Dave Williams of Mt. Hope Church, Lansing, MI for one), and there are still provisions within the General Council Bylaw, Article VI, that instruct a local pastor and church on how to lawfully withdraw from the Assemblies of God “fellowship”. Unfortunately, when those same provisions are exercised, it is neither the rule of Constitutional dictates nor explicit Bylaw language that lend support and logic to the Executives’ thinking; but rather subjective opinions and personal political fiats. In the words of General Secretary John Palmer himself in his letter denying my previous appeal to the Executive Presbytery:

“While you followed proper protocol in how you led the church to disaffiliate, the ethical failure, in the view of the General Council Credentials Committee was that you had a part in the process.” (letter dated June 11, 2008)

With the right side of the mouth I am told that both my church and I obeyed “proper protocol”, but with the left side we’re told that “in the view of the... committee” I was immoral for following those very same rules. When I challenged their logical and legal disconnect in my final appeal letter what did they say?... NOTHING; simply a vacuous form letter wishing me a nice summer with my family!

Finally, the reason I am chronicling this whole affair is to once again place myself open to dialogue and scrutiny. That has been my goal since I penned my first paper some three years ago. You can see from the balance of my writings that I have been forthright and eager for debate; never hiding, but rather sending my positions to the highest officers in the Assemblies of God (an act of professional suicide I was told by many). What began with honest questions about an ecumenical resolution, has led me to where I am now. I want the reader to learn from what I have walked through, and to be able to act with wisdom and courage as the Holy Spirit leads. I have told several Assemblies of God pastors, missionaries, and evangelists who have written to me or called me to share, that I believe that they are in God’s Will and can finish their ministries within the AG machine. My only warning (which I will continue to share with all who ask) is that they take great care so as not to be ground-up within the gears of that same machine! True church autonomy based upon local ownership of property is all but dead, and the frightening path of compromise that has been well worn by other historic denominations is starting to look awfully familiar for the A