

# GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA

## STATISTICS

**Summary for the United States, with urban-rural classification.**—A general summary of the statistics for the General Eldership of the Churches of God in North America for the year 1926 is presented in Table 1, which shows also the distribution of these figures between urban and rural territory.

The membership of the Churches of God in North America consists of those persons who have been admitted to the local churches (by action of the official boards) upon reasonable evidence that they are Christians. Baptism is by immersion only.

**TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, 1926: GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

ITEM	Total	In urban territory <sup>1</sup>	In rural territory <sup>1</sup>	PER CENT OF TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	
				Urban	Rural
<b>Churches (local organizations)</b> .....	428	70	358	16.4	83.6
<b>Members</b> .....	31,596	11,324	20,272	35.8	64.2
Average per church.....	74	162	57		
Membership by sex:					
Male.....	12,182	4,391	7,791	36.0	64.0
Female.....	17,569	6,508	11,061	37.0	63.0
Sex not reported.....	1,845	425	1,420	23.0	77.0
Males per 100 females.....	69.3	67.5	70.4		
Membership by age:					
Under 13 years.....	1,606	569	1,037	35.4	64.6
13 years and over.....	25,689	10,094	15,595	39.3	60.7
Age not reported.....	4,301	661	3,640	15.4	84.6
Per cent under 13 years <sup>3</sup> .....	5.9	5.3	6.2		
<b>Church edifices:</b>					
Number.....	393	68	325	17.3	82.7
Value—Churches reporting.....	384	64	320	16.7	83.3
Amount reported.....	\$3,211,328	\$1,755,768	\$1,455,560	54.7	45.3
Average per church.....	\$8,363	\$27,434	\$4,549		
Debt—Churches reporting.....	44	23	21		
Amount reported.....	\$312,424	\$252,385	\$60,039	80.8	19.2
Churches reporting "no debt" on church edifice.....	282	37	245	13.1	86.9
<b>Parsonages:</b>					
Value—Churches reporting.....	122	40	82	32.8	67.2
Amount reported.....	\$506,550	\$230,600	\$266,950	47.3	52.7
Debt—Churches reporting.....	14	7	7		
Amount reported.....	\$39,200	\$22,300	\$16,900	56.9	43.1
Churches reporting "no debt" on parsonage.....	89	28	61		
<b>Expenditures during year:</b>					
Churches reporting.....	385	63	322	16.4	83.6
Amount reported.....	\$549,002	\$238,995	\$310,007	43.5	56.5
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$451,971	\$198,155	\$253,816	43.8	56.2
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$88,259	\$40,775	\$47,484	46.2	53.8
Not classified.....	\$8,772	\$65	\$8,707	0.7	99.3
Average expenditure per church.....	\$1,426	\$3,794	\$963		
<b>Sunday schools:</b>					
Churches reporting.....	372	67	305	18.0	82.0
Officers and teachers.....	4,640	1,294	3,346	27.9	72.1
Scholars.....	40,559	14,363	26,196	35.4	64.6

<sup>1</sup> Urban territory includes all cities and other incorporated places which had 2,500 inhabitants or more in 1920, the date of the last Federal census; rural territory comprises the remainder of the country.

<sup>2</sup> Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

<sup>3</sup> Based on membership with age classification reported.

The data given herewith for the year 1926 represent 428 active churches, with 31,596 members. The classification of membership by sex was reported by 404 churches, and the classification by age was reported by 334 churches, including, however, only 176 which reported any members under 13 years of age.

**Comparative data, 1890-1926.**—Table 2 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926, 1916, 1906, and 1890.

**TABLE 2.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1890 TO 1926: GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
<b>Churches (local organizations)</b> .....	428	440	511	470
Increase <sup>1</sup> over preceding census:				
Number.....	-12	-71	32	
Per cent.....	-2.7	-13.9	6.7	
<b>Members</b> .....	31,596	28,376	24,356	22,511
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	3,220	4,020	1,845	
Per cent.....	11.3	16.5	8.2	
Average membership per church.....	74	64	48	47
<b>Church edifices:</b>				
Number.....	393	391	417	338
Value—Churches reporting.....	384	390	417	
Amount reported.....	\$3,211,328	\$1,418,787	\$1,050,706	\$643,185
Average per church.....	\$8,363	\$3,638	\$2,520	
Debt—Churches reporting.....	44	50	26	
Amount reported.....	\$312,424	\$90,958	\$44,350	
<b>Parsonages:</b>				
Value—Churches reporting.....	122	112	79	
Amount reported.....	\$506,550	\$194,600	\$130,051	
Debt—Churches reporting.....	14			
Amount reported.....	\$39,200			
<b>Expenditures during year:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	385	402		
Amount reported.....	\$549,002	\$266,338		
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$451,971	\$211,770		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$88,259	\$54,568		
Not classified.....	\$8,772			
Average expenditure per church.....	\$1,426	\$663		
<b>Sunday schools:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	372	388	398	
Officers and teachers.....	4,640	4,706	4,253	
Scholars.....	40,559	39,259	29,487	

<sup>1</sup> A minus sign (-) denotes decrease.

**State tables.**—Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 present the statistics for the Churches of God in North America by States. Table 3 gives for each State the number and membership of the churches classified according to their location in urban or rural territory and the total membership classified by sex. Table 4 gives for selected States the number and membership of the churches for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926, together with the membership for 1926 classified as under 13 years of age and 13 years of age and over. Table 5 shows the value of church property and the debt on such property, for 1926 alone. Table 6 presents, for 1926, the church expenditures, showing separately the amounts expended for current expenses and improvements, and for benevolences, etc., and also gives the data for Sunday schools. Separate presentation in Tables 5 and 6 is limited to those States in which three or more churches reported the principal items shown (values or expenditures), in order to avoid disclosing the financial statistics of any individual church. The States omitted from these tables can be determined by referring to the complete list which appears in Table 3.

**Ecclesiastical divisions.**—Table 7 presents, for each eldership of the Churches of God, the more important statistical data shown by States in the earlier tables, including number of churches, membership, value of church edifices, debt on church edifices, expenditures, and Sunday schools.

**TABLE 3.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, AND TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, BY STATES, 1926: GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX			
	To- tal	Ur- ban	Ru- ral	Total	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Sex not re- ported	Males per 100 females ( <sup>1</sup> )
United States.....	428	70	358	31,596	11,324	20,272	12,182	17,569	1,845	69.3
Middle Atlantic:										
Pennsylvania.....	164	35	129	15,671	7,036	8,635	6,106	9,257	308	66.0
East North Central:										
Ohio.....	58	11	47	3,883	1,554	2,329	1,576	2,295	12	68.7
Indiana.....	37	7	30	2,590	996	1,594	762	952	876	80.0
Illinois.....	27	3	24	2,133	400	1,733	874	1,189	70	73.5
Michigan.....	10	—	10	216	—	216	82	134	—	61.2
West North Central:										
Iowa.....	13	—	13	758	—	758	274	384	100	71.4
Missouri.....	23	4	19	1,351	577	774	631	704	16	89.6
Nebraska.....	4	—	4	180	—	180	59	89	32	—
Kansas.....	9	2	7	445	217	228	169	276	—	61.2
South Atlantic:										
Maryland.....	29	2	27	1,998	200	1,798	675	892	431	75.7
West Virginia.....	14	2	12	588	251	337	256	332	—	77.1
West South Central:										
Arkansas.....	15	1	14	607	7	600	250	357	—	70.0
Oklahoma.....	20	2	18	904	71	833	353	551	—	64.1
Mountain:										
Idaho.....	1	—	1	96	—	96	34	62	—	—
Colorado.....	2	1	1	105	15	90	54	51	—	—
Pacific:										
Washington.....	1	—	1	19	—	19	10	9	—	—
California.....	1	—	1	52	—	52	17	35	—	—

<sup>1</sup> Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

## HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION<sup>1</sup>

### DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY

The revival movement which spread through the United States during the early part of the nineteenth century was not felt as much in the Reformed as in the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches. In one case, however, it made itself apparent, and its fruits are seen in the denomination known as the "General Eldership of the Churches of God in North America."

John Winebrenner was born in the Glade Valley, Woodsborough district, Frederick County, Md., March 25, 1797, his parents being of German descent. Baptized and confirmed in the German Reformed Church (now the Reformed Church in the United States), he early showed an inclination to the ministry, and after completing a course at the district school, an academy at Frederick, and Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa., he went to Philadelphia to study theology under Dr. Samuel Helfenstein. While here, on April 6, 1817, he passed through a peculiar religious experience which he interpreted as sound conversion, and from that moment the work of the ministry, which he had hitherto regarded with more or less indifference, became "the uppermost desire of his heart."

<sup>1</sup> This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Rev. S. G. Yahn, editor of the Church Advocate, Harrisburg, Pa., and approved by him in its present form.

**TABLE 4.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, 1906 TO 1926, AND MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926, BY STATES: GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches in either 1926, 1916, or 1906]

STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926			
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906	Under 13 years	13 years and over	Age not reported	Per cent under 13 <sup>1</sup>
United States.....	428	440	511	31,596	28,376	24,356	1,606	25,689	4,301	5.9
Pennsylvania.....	164	177	177	15,671	14,370	11,157	805	13,530	1,336	5.6
Ohio.....	58	63	70	3,883	3,374	2,980	203	3,293	387	5.8
Indiana.....	37	29	35	2,590	2,064	1,999	151	1,374	1,065	9.9
Illinois.....	27	26	32	2,133	1,516	1,555	130	1,727	276	7.0
Michigan.....	10	10	12	216	282	320	-----	36	180	-----
Iowa.....	13	20	24	758	907	913	44	652	62	6.3
Missouri.....	23	27	37	1,351	986	1,053	76	1,114	161	6.4
Nebraska.....	4	2	12	180	93	329	-----	80	100	-----
Kansas.....	9	11	12	445	935	613	12	433	-----	2.7
Maryland.....	29	27	25	1,998	1,797	1,204	106	1,746	146	5.7
West Virginia.....	14	25	24	588	1,056	781	17	528	43	3.1
Arkansas.....	15	14	23	607	564	737	2	405	200	0.5
Oklahoma.....	20	5	20	904	209	602	33	526	345	5.9
Colorado.....	2	3	-----	105	137	-----	10	95	-----	9.5
Washington.....	1	-----	3	19	-----	50	-----	19	-----	-----
Oregon.....	-----	-----	4	-----	-----	42	-----	-----	-----	-----
Other States.....	2	1	1	148	86	21	17	131	-----	11.5

<sup>1</sup> Based on membership with age classification reported.

**TABLE 5.—VALUE OF CHURCH PROPERTY, AND CHURCH DEBT, BY STATES, 1926: GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting value of edifices]

STATE	Total number of churches	Number of church edifices	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		DEBT ON CHURCH EDIFICES		VALUE OF PARSONAGES		DEBT ON PARSONAGES	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount
United States.....	428	393	384	\$3,211,328	44	\$312,424	122	\$506,550	14	\$39,200
Pennsylvania.....	164	165	161	1,989,224	23	261,790	73	363,000	9	31,900
Ohio.....	58	57	55	347,650	9	24,105	11	31,950	-----	-----
Indiana.....	37	37	37	294,550	-----	-----	5	24,000	1	2,600
Illinois.....	27	26	26	164,500	3	1,150	13	33,200	1	200
Michigan.....	10	10	10	23,100	-----	-----	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	-----
Iowa.....	13	13	13	49,450	-----	-----	4	7,700	-----	-----
Missouri.....	23	18	17	47,000	3	3,700	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	-----
Nebraska.....	4	4	4	7,400	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Kansas.....	9	8	8	59,400	1	10,000	4	13,700	-----	-----
Maryland.....	29	30	28	113,754	2	3,910	4	11,000	1	2,700
West Virginia.....	14	10	10	76,800	2	7,664	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )
Arkansas.....	15	5	5	2,350	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Oklahoma.....	20	6	6	15,300	-----	-----	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	-----
Other States <sup>2</sup> .....	5	4	4	20,850	1	105	8	22,000	2	1,800

<sup>1</sup> Amount included in figures shown for "Other States," to avoid disclosing the statistics of individual churches.

<sup>2</sup> The figures for parsonages (value and debt) include data for 5 churches in Michigan, Missouri, West Virginia, and Oklahoma.

**TABLE 6.—CHURCH EXPENDITURES AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY STATES, 1926:  
GENERAL ELDERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting expenditures]

STATE	Total number of churches	EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR				SUNDAY SCHOOLS			
		Churches reporting	Total amount	For current expenses and improvements	For benevolences, missions, etc.	Not classified	Churches reporting	Officers and teachers	Scholars
United States.....	428	385	\$549,002	\$451,971	\$88,259	\$8,772	372	4,640	40,559
Pennsylvania.....	164	158	333,579	277,272	55,790	517	154	2,290	22,420
Ohio.....	58	55	69,422	52,117	10,695	6,610	56	720	5,730
Indiana.....	37	28	24,824	18,439	5,185	1,200	30	349	2,503
Illinois.....	27	25	25,797	21,378	4,419	-----	25	266	1,835
Michigan.....	10	9	3,608	3,349	259	-----	7	49	242
Iowa.....	13	12	9,509	8,788	721	-----	12	123	822
Missouri.....	23	17	8,393	7,784	609	-----	16	163	1,067
Nebraska.....	4	3	3,000	1,800	1,050	150	3	22	175
Kansas.....	9	9	18,819	18,120	699	-----	9	103	778
Maryland.....	29	29	27,123	21,560	5,333	230	27	275	2,731
West Virginia.....	14	13	13,521	11,965	1,556	-----	10	112	787
Arkansas.....	15	10	1,210	682	463	65	5	25	218
Oklahoma.....	20	12	5,218	4,126	1,092	-----	13	85	692
Other States.....	5	5	4,979	4,591	388	-----	5	58	559

On September 24, 1820, he was ordained in Hagerstown, Md. He then accepted a call to Harrisburg, Pa., with charge of three other churches, commencing his work there October 22, 1820. He was earnest and energetic in his pulpit ministrations, preached experimental religion, sought to raise the standard of true piety, and organized Sunday schools and other church agencies. So searching and impressive was his preaching that many of his hearers became seriously alarmed about their spiritual condition. Revivals of religion were new experiences in the churches of that region, so that his ministry early awakened strong opposition. Some of the members of his charge became much dissatisfied, and the matter was brought to the attention of the Synod of the Reformed Church, which met at Harrisburg, September 29, 1822. The case was not finally disposed of until some time in 1828, when Mr. Winebrenner's connection with the German Reformed Church was finally severed.

After his separation from the Reformed Church, his labors extended to surrounding districts and towns and were attended by extensive revivals of religion. Gradually his views changed on a number of doctrinal points and on the ordinances or sacraments, and about 1825 he organized an independent church, calling it simply the "Church of God." Others followed, both in and around Harrisburg, each assuming the name of "Church of God at ——." These churches, in which all members had equal rights, elected and licensed men to preach, but there was as yet no common bond, general organization, or directing authority. Finally, for the purpose of adopting a regular system of cooperation, a meeting was held at Harrisburg in October, 1830, which was attended by six of the licensed ministers. At this meeting an "eldership," to consist of an equal number of teaching and ruling elders, was organized, which, to distinguish it from the local church eldership, was called the "General Eldership of the Church of God." The work continued to grow and spread to adjoining counties, to the State of Maryland, and to western Pennsylvania and Ohio, where elderships were organized. On May 26, 1845, delegates from these three elderships met at Pittsburgh, Pa., and organized the "General Eldership of the Church of God in North

TABLE 7.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, VALUE OF EDIFICES, DEBT, EXPENDITURES, AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY ELDEERSHIPS, 1926: GENERAL ELDEERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES OF GOD IN NORTH AMERICA

ELDERSHIP	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		DEBT ON CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
Total.....	428	31,596	384	\$3,211,328	44	\$312,424	385	\$549,002	372	40,559
Arkansas.....	11	404	4	1,350	-----	-----	6	482	1	50
Arkansas and Oklahoma.....	6	223	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	-----	6	836	6	199
East Pennsylvania.....	110	11,550	108	1,674,414	20	251,390	110	273,227	105	17,565
Illinois.....	27	2,133	26	164,500	3	1,150	25	25,797	25	1,835
Indiana.....	37	2,500	37	294,550	-----	-----	28	24,824	30	2,503
Iowa.....	15	814	15	52,450	-----	-----	13	9,959	13	882
Kansas.....	11	550	10	62,900	1	10,000	11	21,390	11	1,053
Maryland and Virginia.....	30	1,897	29	114,154	2	3,910	30	27,240	28	2,717
Michigan.....	8	196	8	19,600	-----	-----	7	3,288	6	202
Missouri.....	21	1,295	15	44,000	3	3,700	16	7,943	15	1,007
Nebraska.....	4	180	4	7,400	-----	-----	3	3,000	3	175
Ohio.....	58	3,832	55	343,150	8	23,980	55	69,202	55	5,681
Oklahoma.....	18	881	5	14,500	-----	-----	10	5,110	11	661
Washington and Oregon.....	3	167	-----	( <sup>1</sup> )	-----	-----	3	2,408	3	284
West Pennsylvania.....	48	3,968	48	307,910	3	10,400	42	58,591	44	4,637
West Virginia.....	21	913	16	91,300	3	7,789	20	15,705	16	1,108
Combinations <sup>2</sup> .....	-----	-----	4	19,150	1	105	-----	-----	-----	-----

<sup>1</sup> Amount included in the figures shown on the line designated "Combinations," to avoid disclosing the statistics of individual churches.

<sup>2</sup> The figures for value and debt represent data for churches in Arkansas and Oklahoma eldership and Washington and Oregon eldership.

America," which name was changed in 1896 to the "General Eldership of the Churches of God in North America." The eldership in eastern Pennsylvania dropped the word "General" and became the "East Pennsylvania Eldership of the Church of God."

Missionaries were sent into the Western States, and churches were organized in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, West Virginia, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma (including what was then Indian Territory), Colorado, Oregon, and Washington. In nearly all these States annual elderships have been organized, in cooperation with the General Eldership.

#### DOCTRINE

In doctrine the Churches of God are evangelical and orthodox, and Arminian rather than Calvinistic. They hold, as distinctive views, that sectarianism is anti-Scriptural; that each local church is a church of God and should be so called; that in general, Bible things, as church offices and customs, should be known by Bible names, and a Bible name should not be applied to anything not mentioned in the Bible; and that there are not two, but three, ordinances that are perpetually obligatory, namely, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the religious washing of the saints' feet. The last two they regard as companion ordinances, which are always to be observed together and in the evening. The only form of baptism recognized is the immersion of believers. They have no written creed but accept the Word of God as their only rule of faith and practice. They insist strongly on the doctrines of the Trinity, human depravity, atonement through the sacrifice

of Christ, the office and work of the Holy Spirit, man's moral agency, justification by faith, repentance and regeneration, practical piety, the observance of the Lord's Day, the resurrection of the dead, the eternal being of the soul, and future and eternal rewards and punishments.

#### ORGANIZATION

The organization of the churches is presbyterian. Each local church votes for a pastor, but the annual elderships make the appointments within their own boundaries. The church elects its own elders and deacons, who with the pastor constitute the church council and are the governing power, having charge of the admission of members and the general care of the church work. The ministers within a certain territory and an equal number of laymen elected by the various churches (or charges) constitute annual elderships, corresponding to presbyteries, which have the exclusive right to ordain ministers. Laymen, on recommendation of churches, may be licensed as exhorters. The different annual elderships combine to form the General Eldership, which meets once in four years and is composed of an equal number of ministerial and lay representatives elected by the annual elderships.

#### WORK

The missionary activities of the Churches of God are under the control of the Board of Missions of the General Eldership, composed of persons elected quadrennially. This board has charge of both the home and foreign mission work, the former being principally in the Southwest.

The foreign mission work dates from October, 1896, when the first missionary sailed for India. The missionaries are stationed in Bogra and Ulubaria districts, and the converts secured, the mission schools established, and the mission buildings erected show a good degree of progress.

The educational work of the Churches of God, in its permanent form, began in 1881, when Findlay College, Findlay, Ohio, was incorporated. This institution has been constantly growing and now has a strong faculty, a large student body, and over \$300,000 endowment.

There is a publishing house at Harrisburg, Pa., worth over \$100,000, with \$118,000 endowment, where the Church Advocate and other journals are published.

The denomination celebrated its centennial in Harrisburg in 1925.