

## WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

April 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Saul of Tarsus was fully devoted to arresting and condemning Christian believers. But Christ had other plans for him. As Saul traveled to Damascus to have more Christians arrested, Christ met him in a blinding light and turned him into a believer. The change the risen Jesus worked in Saul was so profound that the Scriptures began to use a new name for him – Paul.

A cunning schemer, Jacob knew how to look out for himself. But God met this grandson of Abraham at the ford of the Jabbok River and wrestled with him all night. When he saw Jacob's tenacity, he changed Jacob's name to Israel to reflect who he was – one who struggles with God.



Abram and Sarai were skeptical of God's promise to make them the progenitors of many nations. But God's promises are sure, so God changed their names to reflect what God was making them to be – Abraham, father of many nations, and Sarah – princess.

I have been asked literally hundreds of times over the past few years when the name of our denomination will come to reflect who and what God has made us to be since he led our church into our profound spiritual transformation nearly two decades ago.

Now, as we celebrate new birth and spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ during this Easter season, I am happy to tell you that the time has at last come to begin the process of changing our denominational name!

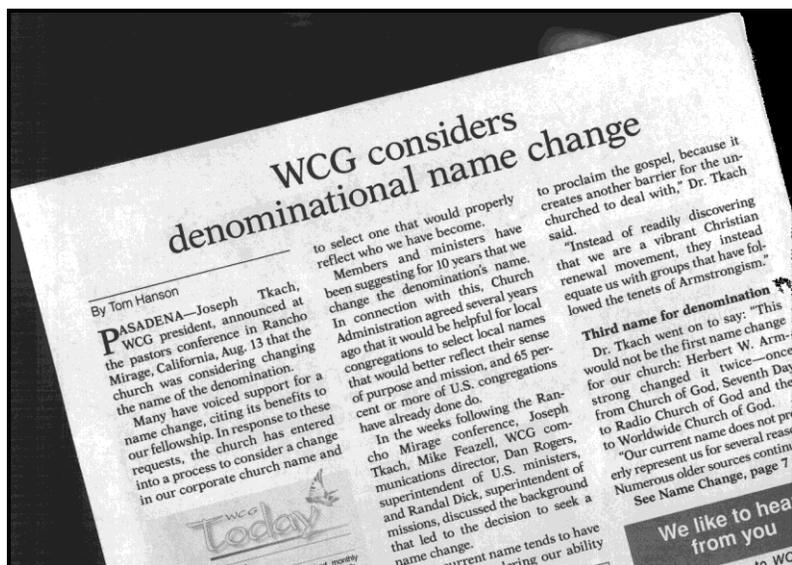
Older members will remember before 1968, we were known as the Radio Church of God. That name made sense at the time, as the church was a pioneer of religious radio broadcasting. In the '30s, '40s and maybe even the '50s, a name that included the word "radio" sounded dynamic and modern. But by the 1960s, that name had begun to sound quaint and out-of-date. Membership was growing, and congregations were being established around the world. We needed a name that described what our church had become, so "Worldwide" was substituted for "Radio."

Today, we are faced with a similar situation. Not only are we a transformed church, but we have found that the name "Church of God" causes many people to confuse us with groups that have used that name far longer than we have, such as the Churches of God, Anderson, Indiana, and others. Some of these churches are Pentecostal, and most are fundamentalist. Because "Church of God" is in our name, many people assume that we are a branch of the many "Churches of God" and share their doctrinal views.

Since the beginning of our spiritual transformation, ministers and members alike have been raising the question of changing the name of the denomination. Our doctrinal foundation, mission focus and church structure have undergone major changes, and a new name signals clearly that a major change has taken place, which in turn serves to strengthen our witness to God's grace and his intervention in our fellowship.

In the October 2005 issue of *WCG Today*, members in the United States were invited to submit possible new church names to their pastors. District superintendents collected the suggested names and forwarded them to us. Members, national directors and missions directors from around the world were also included in the process.

Our name search team, which was appointed by the WCG Board of Directors and was composed of a number of leading men and women from various departments at headquarters, examined the names submitted and made recommendations to the Board and to the Advisory Council of Elders.



After reviewing all the submitted names and discussing the viable ones at length, the search team isolated key terms that reflect the church's values and mission as a denomination while avoiding key terms that are normally associated with other denominations as well as those that are already in use by other organizations.

The name search team presented their findings and recommendations to a combined meeting of the Board and the Advisory Council of Elders on Dec. 20, 2005. After all factors and criteria were considered, the Board and the Council settled on the name "Grace Communion International." Grace lies at the heart of our values and mission as a transformed church. Our spiritual unity with God and with one another is reflected in the word Communion. The word International identifies us as a unified body of believers who span the globe, sharing a common history and journey of faith.

The decision was announced in the February 2006 issue of *WCG Today* and was met with mixed reactions. Although a majority of members expressed their support for the new name, many were uncomfortable with it, so we decided to put the name change on hold, praying that God would reconfirm, in time, whether or not this was truly where he was leading us.

As time has passed, the consensus in favor of the name "Grace Communion International" has continued to grow. Although we cannot expect 100 percent agreement on any name, we have now reached a point at which more than 80 percent of U.S. members favor a change to this name.

We are a church that God has changed radically from what we once were to what we are today. Our change to a new name – one that accurately describes what God has done with us – will be consistent with that transformation.

Of course, most of our congregations have already taken on local names, demonstrating the value in putting before the public a name that better represents who our Father has made us, through the Spirit, to be in Jesus Christ. Grace Communion International describes our spiritual journey together, celebrates our new life in Christ, and communicates our Trinitarian, Christ-centered theology.

As a reminder, local churches, and our international regions, will still be able to choose their own name that may or may not be the same as our denominational name. In some countries, it is even prudent for them to keep the name "Worldwide Church of God."

You will see the name change take shape in a carefully orchestrated way over the next several months. The name, “Worldwide Church of God” will still be ours. Our web address, [www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), will continue to belong to us, and will eventually redirect users to a new web address. New publications and other media will begin to reflect the new name in the next month or so, but keep in mind that all Worldwide Church of God copyrighted material will continue to belong to us, as will everything pertaining to the name Worldwide Church of God.



I praise God, as I know you do, for all he has done for us, in us and through us. Our new name will be but an acknowledgement and reflection of the great love, mercy and power he has displayed in our fellowship.

In the meantime, let's be about our Father's business!

Thank you for all you do in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Without the prayers, financial support, and devotion of God's people to living and sharing the gospel, there would be no church to name! The glory goes to God, of course, but I know he is well pleased with the zeal and love so evident in our congregations around the world.

May God bless you with a joyous Easter season!

With much love in Jesus' name,

Joseph Tkach