

Looking Back and Looking Ahead for the Assemblies of God

One hundred years ago, 300 people gathered in Hot Springs, Ark., drawn by what must have seemed an overwhelming vision: to bring organization and structure to a growing, fiery Pentecostal revival. Church history now recognizes these godly men and women as the first general council of the Assemblies of God, which has become one of the largest Christian movements in the world.

On April 10, 2014, another group of 300 made their way to Hot Springs—this time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the AG at the site of its origin—and I was honored to be among them. You see, the AG was where I found a home after I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today, as a minister, I think of the AG as a great old house, with the kind of impressive structure I'm privileged to continue building upon. To be able to gather with current leaders I admire and pay tribute to those who laid its foundation was a holy and humbling experience.

This symbolic Centennial Celebration was sponsored by the AG Trust, which provides support for church plants and special initiatives of the denomination. Though the stage is bigger and the lights are brighter than they were in 1914, I imagine our agenda probably didn't vary too much from that of the AG's founding fathers and mothers. There were nostalgic "camp meeting" style sessions, extended times at the altar, prayers for the sick, and lively southern gospel songs led by the Goodman Revival. Speakers like Alton Garrison, assistant general superintendent of the AG; Wilfredo De Jesús, senior pastor of New Life Covenant Church, Chicago; and Greg Mundis, executive director of AG World Missions discussed the

denomination's rich roots, and the crowning moment was the recreation of a historic photo of the original 300. I'll never forget what it was like to stand there at the very spot where my own spiritual heritage originated.

But as Dr. George O. Wood, general superintendent of the AG, emphasized, it was more than "a feel-good look back at our past." As he put it, "We're also looking ahead to what the Holy Spirit has for us for the next 100 years."

As I look ahead, like I shared at the Centennial Celebration, I believe God wants His church to be large and loud. With more than 66 million members and 362,000 churches, I would say the AG has made a significant contribution to both the numbers and the noise of the Christian community already. But it's a story that's still being written on a global scale. I've seen the movement become increasingly evangelistic, increasingly diverse, increasingly multigenerational, and increasingly involved in education, church planting and missions around the world.

This theme of both remembrance and renewal is perhaps best embodied by what happened at the final evening service. As the preaching concluded, a group of teens was invited to share. Then the older generation was called forward to lay hands on and bless them. As I reflect on this image—one of honoring the past, embracing the present and empowering the future—I hope it might continue to inspire us in our lives, our homes and our ministries.

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Aug. 5-10, 2014, believers from every corner of the globe are invited to The Centennial, a much-anticipated weeklong conference marking the Assemblies of God's first 100 years and the many more to come. For more information about the events

of that week and how to register, visit .