

Committed to Finish

What drives Bishop Tim Hill more than anything else in ministry is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. As the general overseer and presiding bishop of the Church of God, headquartered in Cleveland, Tennessee, Dr. Hill wants to see the day come when all people around the globe have clearly heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and have had the opportunity to respond. Hill knows that when the Great Commission is fulfilled, Jesus will come again.

The six divisions of the Church of God () range from care to discipleship to education.

“The fundamental foundation stone of all of them is Great Commission visualization,” Hill says. “So we basically have the fundamental understanding that we exist for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.”

For more than 130 years, the Church of God has focused on communicating the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. The movement now has a worldwide membership of more than 7 million in 40,000 churches and is present in 185 nations. Thousands of delegates will convene for the denomination’s 78th International General Assembly () on July 21-24, 2020, in Indianapolis.

Accomplishing the Vision

Even before Hill became general overseer, fulfilling the Great Commission was his burden. For four years, during his tenure as director of world missions, the church called this mission the “Finish Challenge,” he says. “When I became general overseer in 2016, we transitioned from it being a challenge to a commitment. And with that, we were basically making a statement that you can be challenged by a lot of different things and in a lot of different ways, but it’s only when you make a commitment to something that you commit to do

something. And so that has been not just a theme, but the driving passion of my administration for the last almost four years. That has been my heartbeat, and anytime you hear me speak, that's what I'm going to be talking about, at least to some degree."

Charisma House released in 2019 Dr. Hill's book *The Speed of Favor: How God Exceeds, Increases and Accelerates Your Life*.

Hill asserts in the book that favor is for believers today, to help them accomplish God's will and work in the world.

The Speed of Favor "is largely about mission and accomplishing the vision and the Great Commission, and all that God has for us to do in an accelerated frame of time," Hill says. "I built that around Amos 9:13, where it talks about the plowman overtaking the reaper. All of that has to do really with harvest. And the premise of that is that as soon as you sow seed in the ground, we've been in such a time that God has blessed in so many ways that we're able to harvest greater than we've ever done before in an accelerated amount of time."

With this acceleration, the Church of God continues its laser focus on doing its part to finish the Great Commission.

"We know we can't do that alone or by ourselves," Hill says. "We're part of a great group of people. All churches, all denominations, should be a part of that, working toward spreading the gospel of Jesus. But when we talk about finishing the Great Commission, I personally believe that the Church of God is poised and has access to all that we need to help us play a leading role in finishing the Great Commission."

Using the acronym "FINISH," the church has made its mission easy to remember.

"We talked about the letter F, which stands for Find, and that speaks specifically to unreached people groups. Along that

line, we targeted over the next number of years to reach 1,000 unreached people groups, and we have already had tremendous success in that area.

“And then the letter I stands for Intercede. That speaks to prayer. We have just launched a brand-new prayer initiative called ‘We Pray COG.’ Our goal is to enlist 1.5 million active intercessors to pray for the harvest. The Bible says, ‘Pray the Lord of the harvest.’

“Then the letter N stands for Network. This is a big one with us. A friend of mine, James Davis, makes the statement that if you’re not networking, you’re not working. And I’ve borrowed that phrase many times and give him credit for it, but that is really true. We enjoy networking, not only denominationally and with all of our churches around the world—of which there are 40,000 now in 185 nations—but we enjoy networking interdenominationally. Some of our greatest partners are fellow Pentecostal-charismatic churches, but we also are partnering with non-Pentecostal churches who are spreading the gospel of Jesus, so networking is big.

“Then the next letter, I, stands for Invest. And for us, that doesn’t necessarily speak of fundraising or money, but it speaks of church planting. We talk about investing in communities, investing in cities, in countries, and then doing whatever we need to do and have to do to invest in the families and the couples going to plant those churches through training, through education, through financing, in missions, whatever it may be, digging new wells for water, raising up clinics—however we can invest in a community to build a church.

“Then, of course, the next letter S stands for Send or Sending, and that speaks to missions specifically. And along that line, we’re in 185 nations of the world and are about to go into some new nations we have not heretofore been in, and so we are largely a world missions church with most of our

membership outside the United States. We have a little over 7.6 million members, and 1.6 of them are in the United States. The rest are outside. That speaks of our huge global impact. But the truth of that is, were it not for the United States and the churches in the United States that are funding and supporting, we would not be able to do what we do outside the United States. But with that said, the caveat is, we have maturing nations now that, for lack of a better phrase, have grown up and are now funding their own ministries, and that's a beautiful thing as I see it. So the maturing of the nations is a great thing.

"And then the last letter, H, stands for Harvest. That speaks to itself, just harvesting the opportunities that God has given us to help finish the Great Commission and hopefully usher in the soon return of Christ."

Hill doesn't limit his Great Commission message to his denomination, nor only to Pentecostal churches. He shares his message to mission-minded believers inside and outside of the denomination through his broader ministry.

"In my speaking assignments, I've had opportunities to preach in venues, and some have not necessarily been Pentecostal, but we do agree on the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord and He's risen from the grave," Hill says. "He's coming back real soon, and we want to tell people about that."

"We simply understand that the message of Jesus Christ being Lord of all is the fundamental message. Where we agree, we agree, and that is to reach lost people for Jesus Christ, and we have found it very easy. For instance, we are part of the National Association of Evangelicals. And I must admit that I don't agree with everything and everybody that's a part of that group. But there are some wonderful churches and wonderful people who are a part of the National Association of Evangelicals, and together, we try to work in conjunction and coordination where we can."

Hill says the Church of God is linked more closely with the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches in North America (PCCNA).

"We have partnered together in what we call 'GO FINISH 2020,'" he says. "In the month of May, we have a concerted effort among PCCNA churches to witness. May 23 is the exact day, but the Church of God has selected the entire month of May to do that."

GO FINISH 2020 is a global evangelism challenge that will see the Church of God join other outreach ministries and denominations to share Jesus around the world in the same month. The church is partnering with Global Outreach Day (), an evangelistic ministry that is spearheading this worldwide movement.

Dr. Hill asked state administrative bishops, national overseers, pastors and churches in every place the Church of God has a presence to pick a day in May to share Jesus with the lost. The church will celebrate this global effort Saturday, May 23.

Envisioning the Future

Although it wasn't called the Church of God when it was founded in the 19th century, the denomination grew significantly and expects even greater increase in the future.

"We trace our beginning all the way back to 1886, and from there, it became what is now known as the Church of God," Hill says. "What we see in the future is an expansion."

One question occupies Hill's thoughts as he contemplates what God has in store for the Church of God.

"We continually ask the question, 'Is what got us here what will get us there?' And when I ask that question, I understand that in terms of the power of Pentecost, the moving of the Holy Spirit. Absolutely it gets us anywhere we want to go."

But Hill knows there's another important question he must ask as head of the denomination: "Do our methods get us there?"

He knows that it's sometimes hard to release some closely held methods in ministry.

"Will those same methods that got us here get us where God wants to take us?" he asks. "The cold, hard facts are: not always, not necessarily and, in some cases, no. And we have to be willing to face up to that and do inventory and ask ourselves the hard questions. What are we willing to change in order to be the church, to be the people God wants us to be, to fulfill the Great Commission?"

One method that often changes with time is the media.

"I believe in the full use of media ministry," he says. "And what do we have to do media-wise to get the attention of a young generation, sometimes even in how we deliver the gospel? Are we accessing everything that God has put in our hands to give the best delivery of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a new generation, and be inclusive of every generation, for that matter?"

Hill sees the use of media as the responsibility of the church.

"I believe that [because of] the accessibility that we have these days of technology (which, in my opinion, all belongs to Jesus Christ or it should), we have a responsibility to use it to the fullest extent," he says.

Hill knows the church must consider how best to connect people with the gospel in global evangelization, too.

"We have to understand that every country, every nation, every continent has its own nuances," he says. "In no way do we think in terms of compromising the gospel, but are we willing to not go into Africa, not go into a European nation, and

Americanize those nations? That's an old, colonial way of doing things that was done generations ago. Are we willing to go in now and accept the fact that we are guests in those nations, and we build trust, and we build community, while at the same time we hold to the truth of the gospel?"

God has certainly blessed that approach as the Church of God has worked in many countries, some in areas restricted to the gospel. Because of that, often missionaries go to the mission field as professionals.

"One of the great things that Church of God has been a part of for several years now is what we call People for Care and Learning in areas where we couldn't just march through the door preaching the gospel," Hill says. "We went in with education, we went in with medicine clinics. In one case, in Cambodia, we went in with what we call the 'Build the City' project and literally built a small community, housing, all kinds of community support buildings to help support a community and help move people out of poverty into a well-respected living environment. And that's one of the greatest things we've been involved in. We dedicated that when I was in world missions."

Historically, the Church of God has been a rural church, but it has reached people in cities, too, as with the Cambodian project.

"We have reached a great rural harvest, but that has a lot to do with our history because we were birthed in a rural area," Hill says. "But for about the last 50 years, particularly since the early '70s, we have seen a huge, major breakthrough in the urban areas. Matter of fact, when you get outside of the Southeast, where our headquarters are, our next greatest area of impact, where we're having the fastest growth, is probably in the New York City/southern New England area. We have a major project going on right now in Brooklyn, New York, with Pastor R.C. Hugh Nelson. He is building a major, major

development there for housing and also including a church and training center. And what's cool about it is he's doing it in conjunction with the city."

Rural or urban, the Church of God wants to reach people in every environment.

"We began as a very rural church, but over the last 50 years, we've committed not to negate that or separate from that, but at the same time, embrace the huge opportunities that we have in major metropolitan areas now," he says.

Hill points to the City of Light ministry as another urban outreach.

"We have selected 15 different world-class cities that we have put a new emphasis on, planting churches, building church-planting centers, educational outlets," he says. "One of those is a new emphasis in Tokyo. We have really put a new emphasis on Amsterdam. [There is also] Georgetown, Guyana, and Paris, France. We've got some huge things that have just started happening for us in Paris, a new church-planting emphasis going on there."

The Church of God has also been involved in disaster relief, sometimes out of necessity. The denomination lost 15 churches when Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas in September 2019.

"They're in the process of rebuilding the Grand Bahamas throughout the Abacos," he says. "And that can be repeated over and over again because every time there's a hurricane or a flood, we just turn people loose in that area."

Younger generations in the denomination have also been active on the mission field.

"There's a huge student movement right now, young people, unlike we've ever seen before who are willing to go where others haven't been willing to go," he says. "They just want

to be involved in missions. They may not look like a generation did two generations ago or a generation ago; they may not think the same way or preach it the same way, but the fundamental truth is there.”

As the denomination expands and seeks to complete Christ’s Great Commission, Hill sees a paradigm shift in world evangelization.

“Here’s the big one,” he says. “The big one is the mission field has become a mission force. Missionaries come to America now from the Asian countries, and of course, throughout all Latin America. So I believe we have really everything accessible to us right now that makes it doable.”

The Church of God is a shining example of an effective witness leading the way to reach the world for Christ.

“Since the year 2000, we’ve seen 12 million people saved, come to Christ,” Hill says. “We’ve enjoyed about 30.5% growth globally. And our goal for the next 10 years is to see our membership exceed 10 million.”

Those numbers would be daunting to some, but Hill looks to the future full of faith in God when he says: “I think we’ll do it.”

Christine D. Johnson is editor of 2020 Vision. Share your thoughts on this issue with her at @.