Bishop Charles Edward Blake Sr. serves as the presiding bishop and chief apostle of the Church of God in Christ, Inc., a 6 million-member Pentecostal-Holiness denomination. On March 21, 2007, he became the presiding bishop of the Church of God in Christ, (COGIC) Inc., as a result of Presiding Bishop Gilbert E. Patterson's untimely death.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

Editor's note: Join us during the month of April as we feature and highlight the Church of God in Christ.

The Church of God in Christ, Incorporated is the largest Holiness-Pentecostal and African-American Christian denomination in the United States of America.

It is evangelical.

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In a November 2007 during a special election, he was elected to complete the unexpired term of his predecessor. Then again, in November 2008, Bishop Blake was re-elected to serve a four-year term as presiding bishop.

Blake is the fifth presiding bishop (and seventh leader) of the historically African-American denomination. From 1985 until 2009, he was the jurisdictional prelate of the First Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Southern California, overseeing more than 250 churches that make up the

jurisdiction.

The Church of God in Christ, commonly referred to by its acronym, COGIC, was formed in 1907 by Bishop Charles Harrison Mason (1866-1961), who was expelled from his Baptist church in the late 19th century due to his views and teachings of salvation, sanctification, and holiness.

Mason was licensed to preach by Mt. Gale Missionary Baptist Church of Preston, Arkansas. He entered Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1893, but soon became dissatisfied and withdrew because of the methods of teaching and biblical presentation. Soon afterward, he was found preaching and teaching in every church that would allow him to do so.

His messages were primarily based on declaring Christ by precept and example and of holy and righteous living. His teachings caused the Leavenworth Baptist Association to withdraw the right hand of fellowship from Bishop Mason.

After being removed from the Baptist church, Bishop Mason was able to continue services in the home of Mr. John A. Lee. These living room services were so well attended that a gentleman named Mr. Watson asked Bishop Mason to transfer services to an old, abandoned cotton gin house near the bank of a little creek in Lexington, MS.

This was known as the first Church Of God In Christ facility.

During these events, Bishop Mason became associated with Charles Price Jones of Jackson, Mississippi, J.A. Jeter, of Little Rock, Arkansas, and W.S. Pleasant of Hazelhurst, Mississippi during the Holiness Movement of the late 19th century.

As the result of one of these Holiness revivals breaking out in Jackson, Mississippi, a new church, eventually called the
Church of God In Christ
, was formed. The first convocation called by these Holiness individuals was held in 1897 at the Mt. Helm Missionary Baptist Church
in

Jackson
.

Simultaneously in 1897, while seeking a name to distinguish this Holiness body from others, Bishop Mason came to believe that the name Church of God in Christ was divinely revealed and biblically supported in I Thessalonians 2:14, II Thessalonians 1:1 and Galatians 1:22.

This name was actually given to Bishop Mason in 1897 while walking south on Gaines Street toward the intersection with
8th Street
in
Little Rock, AR.

Later that original Church Of God In Christ would be reorganized with C.P. Jones as general overseer, Elder C.H. Mason as overseer of Tenness
ee , and
Elder J.A. Jeter as overseer of
Arkansas
.

In 1906, Elder C. H. Mason, Elder Jeter, and Elder D.J. Young were appointed as a committee by General Overseer C.P. Jones to investigate reports of a revival in Los Angeles, conducted by the itinerant preacher, William J. Seymour.

Elder C.H. Mason's visit to what was known as the Azusa Street Revival changed the direction of the newly formed Holiness COGIC church. Upon his return to Tennessee from the Azusa Street Revival, C.H. Mason began preaching and teaching the Pentecostal, Holiness message with power and the fire of the Holy Ghost.

In 1907, Elder Jeter and Elder C.P. Jones rejected C.H. Mason's biblical teaching on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a mutual separation. Overseer C.P. Jones continued to lead his COGIC adherents as a Holiness church, changing the name in 1915 to the Church of C hrist
(Holiness) U.S.A. C.H. Mason called a conference in

Memphis
,
Tennessee
and reorganized the
Church of God
in Christ as a Holiness Pentecostal body.

The 1907 attendees during this reorganization were Elder E.R. Driver, Elder J. Bowe, Elder, R.R. Booker, Elder R. E. Hart, Elder W. Welsh, Elder A.A. Blackwell, Elder E.M. Blackwell, Elder E.M. Page, Elder R.H.I. Clark, Elder D.J. Young, Elder James Brewer, Elder Daniel Spearman, and Elder J.H. Boone.

These men organized the first Pentecostal General Assembly of The Church of God In Christ and unanimously chose Overseer C.H. Mason as general overseer and chief apostle.

Overseer Mason was given complete authority to establish doctrine, organize auxiliaries and appoint overseers or bishops. During this time, Bishop Mason had the opportunity to ordain and appoint many of the bishops, pastors, and leaders who would go on to lead organizations such as the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and the United Pentecostal Church
.

Bishop Mason dedicated 20 days, November 25th through December 14th annually as a meeting time for all followers to fellowship with each other and transact all ecclesiastical and secular affairs pertinent to growth of the National Organization.

This meeting is commonly called the COGIC National Holy Convocation of Saints and is held in Memphis
.

The first national COGIC meeting was held at 392 S. Wellington St. in Memphis.

The first national tabernacle was built and completed at 958 S. Fifth St. in 1925.

This tabernacle was destroyed by fire in 1936. In 1945, Bishop Mason dedicated Mason Temple in Memphis. As the church national meeting site. The miracle of this event was that Mason Temple was built for less than $400,000 during World War II. The auditorium hall was the largest church structure owned by any Black religious group in America at the time of its completion.