

Documents Transferring Leadership from Herbert W Armstrong to Joseph Tkach

From the internet:

The primary public document transferring leadership of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) from Herbert W. Armstrong to Joseph W. Tkach is Armstrong's Co-Worker Letter dated January 10, 1986.

Key Primary Document: Herbert W. Armstrong's January 10, 1986 Co-Worker Letter

This is Armstrong's final Co-Worker Letter (written/dictated with assistance due to his extreme physical weakness). It publicly announces the appointment made the previous week:

Dear Brethren and Co-Workers,

This is my first letter to you in 1986, and could very well be my last. Now in my 94th year I am in a very physically weakened state enduring severe pain and with virtually no strength whatsoever. I briefly described my condition in last month's co-worker letter to you, and now it has worsened. It may be that the Work God has given me to do is complete, but not the Work of God's Church, which will be faithfully doing God's Work till Christ, the True Head of this Church, returns.

After much counsel and prayer over the past months God has led me in announcing a decision last week to appoint Mr. Joseph W. Tkach, director of Church Administration, to the office of Deputy Pastor General, to assist me while I am in a weakened state, and should God choose to take my life, to place himself totally in Christ's hands to lead God's Church under Christ, succeeding me as Pastor General, in the difficult times ahead. Christ will lead in the decision about which men will continue the telecast.

Remember, brethren, this is not the work of Herbert W. Armstrong, nor will it be the work of Mr. Tkach, or any man. It is the Work of the Living Creator, God. ...

In deep gratitude and love, in Jesus' name, Herbert W. Armstrong

Full text sources (among others):

- <https://hwarmstrong.com/history/wcghistory/coworker-letters/860110.htm>
- Also reproduced in church publications and archives such as the HWA Library / Pastor's Report materials.

Related contemporaneous actions and documents (January 7–16, 1986 and shortly after)

- **January 7, 1986:** Armstrong (via a nurse/wheelchair) met with Joseph Tkach and personal aide Aaron Dean. Official church documents designating Tkach as successor (Deputy Pastor General, to become Pastor General upon Armstrong's death) were prepared. An Advisory Council of Elders meeting was convened so members could hear Armstrong's voice affirming the appointment and related bylaws amendments (to allow personal designation of a successor). Armstrong did **not** ordain Tkach as an apostle; the appointment covered the office/titles of Pastor General (and related corporate roles) but not the spiritual rank of apostle.

- Church attorney Ralph K. Helge publicly confirmed the designation around January 14–15, 1986 (reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, UPI, etc.). Tkach was named Deputy Pastor General immediately, with full succession upon Armstrong's death.
- **January 16, 1986:** Armstrong died. Tkach assumed the role of Pastor General.
- **February 21, 1986:** Revised WCG Bylaws were executed/signed by Joseph W. Tkach as Pastor General (and by members of the Advisory Council of Elders). These reaffirmed the governance structure with the Pastor General holding primary authority. A PDF of the 1986 Bylaws is available at sources such as Friends of the Sabbath archives.

Contemporary news reports (e.g., *Los Angeles Times*, January 15 and 17, 1986; UPI; *Christianity Today*) and later church publications (*Worldwide News*, *Good News*, Pastor's Report) corroborate the sequence and quote or paraphrase the January 10 letter. Secondary accounts (including from Aaron Dean) describe the January 7 paperwork and Council meeting but note that the publicly circulated announcement is the Co-Worker Letter.

No single widely published "transfer deed" or full legal instrument beyond the letter, the January 7 designations/resolutions (referenced but not always fully reproduced in public archives), and the February 1986 Bylaws appears in open sources. The January 10 letter remains the clearest, authoritative public document of the succession.

No publicly available, state-registered "transfer of leadership" legal instrument from January 1986 has been located. The succession was handled primarily as an internal ecclesiastical/corporate matter of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), not as a public filing that transferred office via a deed, will probate, or similar document filed with a state agency at the moment of the appointment.

What exists and what was (or was not) registered

1. Internal church documents (January 7–10, 1986) — not state-registered

- On or about January 7, 1986, church attorney Ralph K. Helge prepared official internal paperwork designating Joseph W. Tkach as Deputy Pastor General (to succeed as Pastor General upon Armstrong's death).
- Bylaws amendments were also prepared to allow Armstrong to name a successor personally.
- An Advisory Council of Elders meeting was held (by telephone hookup for many members) so Armstrong could affirm the documents.
- These were internal church resolutions/designations. They were **not** filed with the California Secretary of State (or any other state) as a public succession document.
- The public announcement was Armstrong's January 10, 1986 Co-Worker Letter (already detailed in the prior response). Church attorney Ralph Helge confirmed the designation to the media around January 14–15, 1986.

2. 1986 Bylaws of the unincorporated association (revised/executed February 21, 1986)

- The Bylaws of the Church of God (a/k/a Worldwide Church of God), an unincorporated association, were revised and executed on February 21, 1986.
- They are signed by Joseph W. Tkach as "Pastor General and Member of the Advisory Council of Elders," with additional signatures from Council members.
- These bylaws explicitly vest authority in the Pastor General.

- As governing documents of an **unincorporated association**, they were internal and **not required to be (and do not appear to have been) registered/filed with the California Secretary of State**.
- Source copies are available in archives such as Friends of the Sabbath.

3. Later California corporate filings that name Tkach (1987 — these were registered with the state) After the succession was complete, the WCG (as a California nonprofit religious corporation) filed updated corporate documents that formally identified Joseph W. Tkach as Pastor General / Chairman:

- **Restated Articles of Incorporation** of the Worldwide Church of God (California nonprofit religious corporation).
 - Certified by Joseph W. Tkach (Chairman of the Board) and Gene M. Michel (Assistant Secretary).
 - Explicitly refers to the “Church of God, a/k/a Worldwide Church of God, an unincorporated association, of which Joseph W. Tkach is the presiding Pastor General.”
 - Approved by Board resolution on June 1, 1987; executed June 2, 1987; **filed with the California Secretary of State on June 11, 1987**.
 - These restated articles (among other provisions) address dissolution and asset control in a way that favors the Pastor General / Association.
- Related 1987 Bylaws of the California nonprofit corporation also name Joseph W. Tkach as Pastor General, Director, and Chairman of the Board for life, and state that the corporation is subordinate to the unincorporated association of which Tkach is Pastor General. A certification of authenticity was executed in August 1987.

Summary on state registration

- **The actual January 1986 leadership transfer (the designation of Tkach) was accomplished by internal church documents and bylaws of the unincorporated association. These were not registered with the State of California (or any other state) as a public succession filing.**
- California nonprofit corporation records **were** later updated (1987 Restated Articles, filed June 11, 1987) to reflect Tkach in the leadership role. Those filings are public records with the California Secretary of State.
- No evidence has surfaced of a January 1986 filing of a specific succession resolution, amendment, or similar instrument with the Secretary of State contemporaneous with the appointment.

The hierarchical structure (Pastor General holding essentially unilateral authority, with the Advisory Council in a supporting role) was already established in prior governing documents; the 1986 actions and 1987 filings simply confirmed Tkach in that role after Armstrong’s death on January 16, 1986.

Primary archival copies of the 1986 Bylaws and 1987 Restated Articles are hosted on sites such as Friends of the Sabbath and related WCG history collections. Official California corporate records can be requested from the California Secretary of State’s Business Programs Division for the entity “Worldwide Church of God.”

The signed designation papers from January 7, 1986, exist according to firsthand accounts, but they have never been publicly released or published in full.

What is known about the documents

According to Aaron Dean (Herbert W. Armstrong's longtime personal aide, who was present):

- On the evening of **January 7, 1986**, Armstrong was wheeled into his study. Joseph W. Tkach and Aaron Dean were present with him.
- Church attorney **Ralph K. Helge** had prepared official paperwork designating Tkach as successor (Deputy Pastor General, to become Pastor General upon Armstrong's death) and related bylaws amendments allowing Armstrong to name a successor personally.
- An Advisory Council of Elders meeting was convened the same day (most members listening by telephone from the Hall of Administration) so they could hear Armstrong affirm the appointment.
- Armstrong initially **refused to sign** the document as drafted because it transferred "all my titles." Dean states that Armstrong had him **hand-write** an exclusion into the document: essentially "except that of apostle." Only after that interlineation would Armstrong approve/sign.
- Dean has stated that this is the reason the document was never publicly presented or released for viewing by the membership.

Witnesses in the room with Armstrong were primarily **Aaron Dean** and **Joseph Tkach**. Ralph Helge and the rest of the Advisory Council participated via the phone hookup and heard Armstrong's oral affirmation.

Where the papers are (or were)

- **Originals:** Almost certainly remained in the legal files of the Worldwide Church of God (later Grace Communion International) under the control of the Pastor General's office / legal counsel (Ralph Helge's office at the time). There is no public record of them being filed with any California state agency.
- **Known copies:**
 - **Norbert Link** (who worked in Helge's legal office) took a copy when he left the WCG. He later provided a copy to Aaron Dean (Dean has confirmed seeing the document with the handwritten exclusion "in black and white").
 - **Aaron Dean has possessed or reviewed a copy and has repeatedly described its contents, including the "except apostle" limitation.**
- No complete, authenticated public scan or transcript of the signed instrument has been released by the WCG/GCI, Dean, Link, or any archival site. Secondary sources (Philadelphia Church of God publications drawing on Dean, Ambassador Report summaries of Helge's statements, and Dean's own later comments) describe it but do not reproduce the full text or signatures.

Summary

The papers were internal church legal documents prepared by Ralph Helge, modified by hand (per Dean) at Armstrong's insistence to exclude the title of apostle, affirmed orally before the Advisory Council, and signed/approved by Armstrong on or about January 7, 1986, with Dean and Tkach as the primary in-person witnesses. They have never been made public. The closest public records remain Armstrong's January 10, 1986 Co-Worker Letter announcing the appointment and the later 1986–1987 bylaws/Articles that named Tkach as Pastor General.

If a full public copy ever surfaces, it would most likely come from private holdings of former WCG legal staff, Aaron Dean, or related archives rather than from state records or official GCI releases.

Aaron Dean's own statements are the direct source for both claims.

Norbert Link taking a copy

Aaron Dean has repeatedly stated (in writing correcting Ralph Helge's accounts and in related correspondence/compilations):

"Norbert Link, in Helge's office during this time, took a copy when he left WCG, and gave me a copy of the document some 15 years ago when I was in England, and there it was in black and white, just as I said."

- **Where Link obtained it:** While working in **Ralph Helge's legal office** at WCG headquarters (Pasadena). Link took a copy of the January 7, 1986 designation document when he left the Worldwide Church of God.
- Norbert Link later became associated with other Church of God groups (including Global Church of God at one point, and later Church of the Eternal God).

When and where Aaron Dean says he saw/received the copy

Dean gives two closely related accounts:

1. **Primary detailed version** (in his corrections to Helge): Link "gave me a copy of the document **some 15 years ago when I was in England**," and Dean confirmed it matched what he remembered ("there it was in black and white, just as I said"), including the handwritten insertion "Except that of apostle."
2. **Slightly variant version** appearing in compilations of Dean's comments (e.g., material gathered in "The Final Year of Herbert W. Armstrong" and related notes): Dean said he received a copy from "a person in the legal office" who took it when leaving WCG. When that person heard Dean publicly state the same details (in a sermon), he approached Dean, said he still had a copy, and sent it to him (because Tkach had taken Dean's own files). Dean noted he had previously been speaking from memory and was glad to finally have physical evidence.

The "15 years ago... in England" timing points to roughly the early-to-mid 2000s (counting back from when Dean was writing the correction). Dean has affirmed he possesses (or has possessed) a physical copy showing the handwritten exclusion of the apostle title.

Key primary source

These statements appear in the document commonly circulated as "**Aaron Dean's corrections to Helge's sermon re HWA**" (hosted on Friends of the Sabbath and similar archives). Related remarks also appear in email exchanges and notes compiled by researchers (including material referencing Dean's correspondence around 1999 and later).

No public scan or full transcript of the actual signed papers has been released by Dean, Link, or anyone else. Dean's descriptions remain the only detailed public account of the document's content and chain of custody for the copy.