

Strategy for Church of God Co-operation

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“By this all people will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35, ESV)

“This is my commandment, that you love one another
as I have loved you.” (John 15:12, ESV)

Introduction

In the 1990s I produced a strategy for Church of God co-operation, and it is probably in a box somewhere. Based on what I can recall of it and with further thought, I have produced the summary below.

In the first instance, **it should be acknowledged that this strategy is not about merging groups** in the main, but cooperating in some way to try and stop and reverse their decline.

The basic thesis for this short strategy is that we, in the various Church of God (CoG) groups, should have regard for each other as brethren, recognising each other despite minor differences and working together which is essential in these days. I call our groups the 'Church of God family.'

For the groups have attempted outreach/evangelism on a major scale, but have never been able to attain to a level that is necessary for a multiplicity of reasons, that can be discussed in another article in the future.

The various groups, it is assumed, would probably work toward co-operation at different levels and speeds dependent on approach, minor doctrinal differences and governance structure.

Their decline and lack of growth is self-inflicted and not of God Who will not force them to do this or that to ensure growth or outreach. It is His desire that they prosper and grow and if they do not, that is based on *their* decision-making. In other words, they need to quit blaming God for the disunity and lack of outreach. Rather, soul-searching and admitting to their failures is paramount.

Several years since writing the initial strategy, I have now formulated (late 2025/early 2026) a more detailed strategy that incorporates a basic project plan. Should any church groups be interested in following this plan, they can leverage off it and infill the details for their particular need.

How a group or groups can achieve real friendship or cooperation given all the tensions, without a methodical approach, is highly unlikely.

1. Strategy Outline

In developing a strategy, one must come to an understanding of the groups and their differences; and their desires for cooperation, which, dependent upon various criteria will determine their level of interest.

Levels of interest from the CoG groups could probably fall into these categories:

- Unification
- Federation
- Confederation
- Friends
- Not interested

NB: for instance, those groups that decide to federate with each other, could confederate with others. Or groups that merge, may federate or confederate with other groups. It is not an either/or strategy but rather that there would likely be overlap between these categories.

The table below attempts to capture the various aspects of the proposed strategy and summarise them.

2. Strategy Summarised in Table Format

The strategy as formulated is provided in table form below and in more detail in the following section.

Type of Interest	Reasons	Strategy (short version)	Organisation
Unification (full merger with a single head office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close in administrative structure • Close in Fundamental doctrines • Close in secondary level doctrines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations first • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational mergers • Initial unified annual ministerial conferences • Single logo and policies for all regions and congregations • Single website • Legal unification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tba • tba • tba
Federation (head office with representation from regions based on agreed criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close in doctrine • Historical differences in administrative structure • Suspicions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations first • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational mergers • Initial unified annual ministerial conferences • Single logo • Single website • Similar policies for all regions and congregations • Legal agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tba • tba • tba
Confederation (loose association & congregational independence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic doctrinal agreement (but not in every detail) • Desire for congregational independence • Suspicions • Past hurts • May evolve into a federation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations first • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational cooperation • Initial annual ministerial conferences • Joint socials • Joint projects • Link websites • Documented governance approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tba • tba • tba
Friends (recognition and cooperation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eg may not observe Feast Days or other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders visit each other • All ministers speak well of each other's groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tba • tba • tba

Type of Interest	Reasons	Strategy (short version)	Organisation
	critical doctrines, but willing to be friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional preaching in each other's groups • Joint projects • Joint socials • Share books in each other's central or congregational libraries 	
Not interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership differences • Extremism • Past hurts • Spirit of competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the negative approach, still let them know that they are considered a part of the 'Church of God family' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tba • tba • tba

The following will be generic to each category above, with the exception of the final one:

- In Church services make announcements about other groups including prayer requests,
- Ministers speak at each other's Sabbath services and Feast sites as they are able,
- Hold Feast sites in close proximity so that members can visit each other's sites with ease,
- Not stand in the way of members wishing to visit other groups or presenting at other groups or their Feast sites,
- Hold annual BBQs of the ministry to break down barriers and foster friendships,
- Apologies where there have been past hurts,
- Link websites and share literature,
- Permit ministerial observers from other groups to sit in on meetings such as general conferences in a non-voting capacity.

3. Comments

It is essential that all of this takes a methodical, step-by-step, considered approach, guided by God's spirit. A laissez faire or scatter-brain approach usually does not work in any sphere of life. Or thinking that just offering up a prayer and God will do the rest while one waits for His miracle, seldom works. God expects us to put in the time and effort in all that matters, thereby learning from the process and developing character.

My thinking is that in most cases various CoG groups would be interested in a level of cooperation (Federation or Confederation) rather than full unity at this time due to differences in governance structure and doctrine.

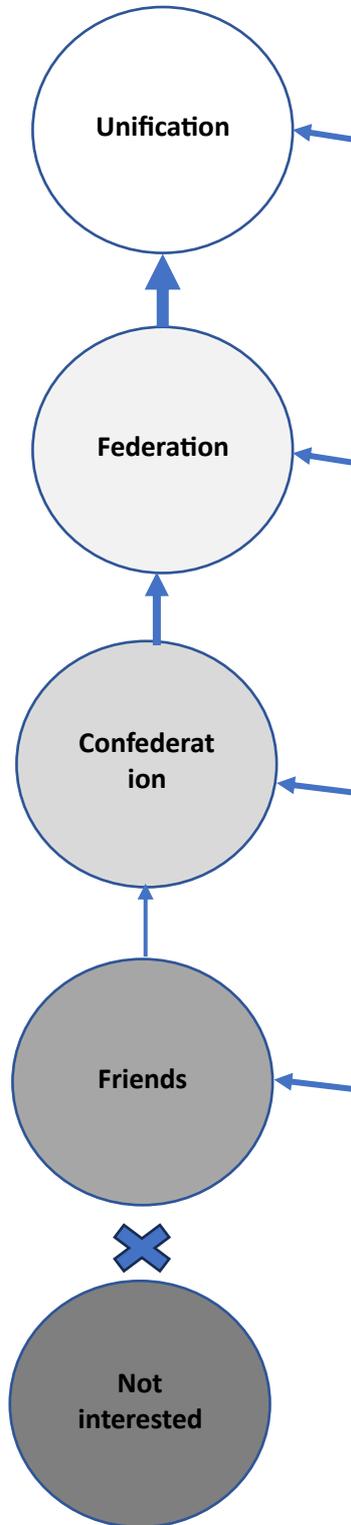
The foreseen fruits of these suggested efforts would be:

1. A greater Work/outreach. And because success beckons success, there will be growth. "If you build, they will come,"
2. Happier churches,
3. Demonstrating brotherly love to the world,
4. And most of all, please and glorify God.

The aforementioned is not difficult to accomplish at all, it just needs a full strategy with a step-by-step, project management approach. And associated policies that 'plug in' to the overall plan.

This writer has developed a broad project plan which is included in this paper. A complete, more detailed plan can be formulated later, but it would normally be the duty of a particular group to develop such and to work to it accordingly.

4. Schematic of Types of Interest



5. Detailed Strategy for Church of God Cooperation

Vision

The core vision remains as outlined above: to foster cooperation among various Church of God (CoG) groups – sometimes referred to as the "Church of God family" with roots in Sabbatarian traditions (mainly, but not exclusively, stemming from the former Worldwide Church of God and related fellowships) - without necessarily aiming for full merger. The focus is on reversing decline through mutual recognition as brethren, shared outreach, and brotherly love, ultimately glorifying God and expanding the Work to permit new members and bring the True Gospel and Warning Message to the world.

Goals & Objectives

1. Build trust and relationships across groups.
2. Facilitate low-commitment cooperation (e.g., members and ministers visiting and speaking at other CoG services, including Feasts. Forging various areas of cooperation and recognition at perhaps the Confederation level) as entry points.
3. Enable higher levels (e.g., linking to each other's websites, using each other's literature, joint outreach and possible Federation or even Unification) where feasible.
4. Increase collective outreach/evangelism efforts.
5. Demonstrate unity to members and the world, leading to growth ("If you build it, they will come").
6. Develop a database or matrix of differences between those groups seeking cooperation (e.g., doctrines, sub-doctrines, policies, practices/culture).

NB: It seems that there is a confusion between the absolute core of Christianity (10 Commandments, fruit of the spirit, beatitudes, gifts of the spirit) and other essentials and policies. Perhaps we need to understand this under the following categorisation:

1. Core Christian values per the above.
2. Fundamentals of Belief (there would be major overlap between groups).
3. Doctrines (e.g. meaning of Atonement; meaning of Passover; divorce & remarriage; healing; church eras).
4. Sub-doctrine (e.g. Azazel goat interpretation; Passover was originally on 14 or 15 Abib; Satan's fate; specific identity of gentile nations or tribes of Israel).
5. Policies (how to implement Sabbath observance, divorce & remarriage).
6. Practices and culture (e.g., the 'way' the particular CoG operates overall, i.e., its overall philosophy. Some are more relaxed than others; some give a lot of room for a minister to handle his congregation the way he wishes; others require ministers to operate in accordance with the CoG's overall philosophy, pastoral handbook etc).

Levels of Cooperation (Expanded Definitions)

Building on the original categories, with flexibility for overlap:

Level	Description	Governance Impact	Examples of Activities
Unification	Full merger into one organisation.	Shared administration, doctrine alignment required.	Joint administration, unified literature, single Feast sites.
Federation	Formal alliance with shared resources and joint decisions on select areas (e.g., outreach).	Joint federal council with voting; retain group autonomy.	Co-funded media/evangelism, shared training programs, mutual ministerial ordination recognition.
Confederation	Loose alliance for specific projects; no binding decisions.	Advisory body only; full autonomy.	Feast site proximity, shared prayer lists, guest speaking, linked websites.
Friends	Informal goodwill and occasional interaction.	No formal structure.	Announcements/prayers for each other, personal visits, apologies for past hurts.
Not Interested	No participation; respect boundaries.	None.	N/A

Groups can participate at multiple levels simultaneously (e.g., confederate with some, federate with others).

Expanded Activities by Category

The table above is enhanced with phased implementation and contains specifics:

Generic Activities (Applicable to Federation, Confederation, Friends):

- Announce other groups' events, prayer requests, and updates in services/bulletins.
- Invite ministers for guest speaking at Sabbaths, Holy Days, or Feast sites.
- Coordinate Feast of Tabernacles sites geographically close (e.g., within driving distance) for easy cross-visitation.
- Encourage (without pressure) member transfers, visits, or dual attendance.
- Host annual or biannual ministerial retreats/BBQs/socials to build personal relationships.
- Issue formal apologies for historical divisions/hurts where appropriate.
- Link websites, share free literature digitally, co-promote resources.

- Allow non-voting observers at conferences/councils.

Federation-Specific Additions:

- Joint evangelism projects (e.g., shared online media, booklets, or public Bible studies).
- Coordinated youth camps or leadership training.
- Mutual recognition of baptisms/ministerial credentials.

Unification-Specific Additions:

- Doctrinal reconciliation process.
- Merged governance elections.

Step-by-Step Project Implementation Plan

Adopt a detailed project management approach with phases, timelines, responsibilities, and milestones. Assume a neutral coordinator (e.g., a small steering committee) initiates.

An basic plan (which can be used as a template) has been formulated below which can be fleshed out by groups as required.

Phase 1: Preparation and Mapping (Months 1-6)

- **Tasks:**
 - Compile a directory of CoG groups that are perceived as might being interested.
 - Assess interest: Send surveys/letters (or visits) to headquarters/ministers gauging desired cooperation level.
 - Identify barriers (doctrinal differences, governance, past hurts).
 - Form a neutral "CoG Cooperation Initiative" steering group or bi-lateral sub-committees (volunteers from interested parties).
- **Responsibilities:** Steering committee plus invite 5-8 ministers as advisors.
- **Milestones:** Directory published (online/private); initial responses received.
- **Resources Needed:** Website/email list for communication; budget.

Phase 2: Building Relationships (Months 7-18)

- **Tasks:**
 - Organise regional ministerial meetings/socials (start virtual via Zoom for low cost).
 - Facilitate apologies/exchanges on historical issues.
 - Pilot low-risk activities: Website links, shared prayer lists, guest speaking invitations.

- Host a "CoG Family Retreat" or virtual conference focused on unity Scriptures (e.g., John 17:20-22; Ephesians 4:1-6).
- **Responsibilities:** Steering group organises; rotating hosts per region.
- **Milestones:** First 3-5 joint events; 50% of groups linking websites.
- **Metrics:** Attendance feedback; increased cross-visitation reports.

Phase 3: Operational Cooperation (Months 19-36)

- **Tasks:**
 - Coordinate Feast sites (map and suggest proximities annually).
 - Launch joint projects: Shared online resource hub (literature archive), coordinated public access TV/radio if feasible.
 - Explore joint outreach (e.g., combined booklet mailing or digital ads).
 - For interested subgroups: Form confederation councils.
- **Responsibilities:** Sub-committees for Feast coordination, digital resources.
- **Milestones:** First joint Feast proximities; launch of shared website/platform.
- **Metrics:** Growth in attendance/membership reports; feedback surveys.

Phase 4: Evaluation (Ongoing, Annual Review)

- **Tasks:**
 - Annual "CoG Cooperation Conference" for reporting/progress.
 - Adjust based on feedback; pursue federation where interest aligns.
 - Measure fruits: Outreach impact, membership trends, member happiness surveys.
- **Responsibilities:** Steering group; independent auditor or advisor.
- **Milestones:** Sustained participation; evidence of growth/reversal of decline (this will take years of monitoring).

Risks and Mitigation:

- Resistance due to doctrine/governance: Start with "Friends" level; emphasise voluntary.
- Risk matrix: assemble a matrix after consultation.
- Logistics: Use digital tools heavily initially.
- Funding: Volunteer-based; seek donations for events.

Policies to Support the Plan:

- Non-interference: No proselytising members.
- Respect autonomy: All activities optional.
- Transparency: Public progress reports.
- Inclusivity: Open to all Sabbatarian CoG groups recognising core truths.

- Stakeholder engagement: consult with all levels (elders, deacons, members) in the congregations.

This detailed plan builds directly on the original strategy, making it actionable while remaining flexible. It emphasises starting small to build success and momentum. If implemented with prayer and commitment, it could lead to the foreseen fruits: a greater Work, happier congregations, visible brotherly love, and God's blessing.

Church groups can start at any level and may progress to a higher level over time.

