



The logo of the Affirming Pentecostal Church, the largest LGBT-affirming Apostolic denomination in the world.

## Apostolic Pentecostals

by William H. Carey

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Apostolic Pentecostals, also known as Oneness Pentecostals, are a group of denominations within Pentecostalism. Although most of these denominations, like most Pentecostal denominations generally, condemn homosexuality, there recently have emerged affirming denominations of Apostolic Pentecostals that do not regard homosexuality as sinful.

### **Pentecostalism**

Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that emphasizes a direct personal experience with God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The name *Pentecostal* derives from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish feast of Shavuot; this is the day the Holy Spirit was given to the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

Pentecostals view themselves as the continuation of that event, reflecting the same kind of spiritual power, worship styles, and teachings that were found in the early church. Pentecostals believe the nine Gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are still available to modern Christians. Many Pentecostals, especially Apostolic Pentecostals, also believe that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal is an umbrella term that includes a range of theologies. For example, approximately two thirds of Pentecostals are Trinitarian, whereas others are Apostolic (Oneness).

The modern Pentecostal movement traces its beginnings to the early moments of 1901. In Topeka, Kansas, Bethel Bible School met in a half-built mansion known as Stone's Folly (named for a Mr. Stone who began building it, but lacked the funds to complete it). As the new year dawned, the students were gathered in prayer, when Mrs. Agnes Ozman began to speak in tongues, that is, in a language unknown to her. By the next day, all the students had experienced this phenomenon.

The movement spread to Houston, where an African-American Baptist minister by the name of William Seymour heard the message. Although he did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit there, he did believe what he witnessed, and carried the message to Los Angeles. There he rented a livery stable, and round-the-clock services continued for years.

From this beginning, Pentecostal organizations formed, beginning with the Assembly of God and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. It is estimated that there are more than 115,000,000 adherents of Pentecostalism, which is riven into several major branches and numerous denominations. Apostolic Pentecostals are believed to number in excess of 35,000,000.

Today, most of the followers of Pentecostalism are in the developing world, though most of the movement's leadership comes from North America. Pentecostalism has had a particular appeal for the poor and, in the United States, for rural whites and urban African Americans.

## **Apostolic Pentecostalism**

Apostolic theology differs from that of other Pentecostals in that they do not believe in a triune Godhead, but rather believe that all the fullness of God resides in Jesus.

In addition, Apostolics practice baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus, rather than using the trinitarian formula favored by most Christian churches. They believe that all the recorded instances of Christian baptism in the New Testament were performed using only the name of Jesus, and thus that they are following apostolic example.

Mainstream Apostolic denominations include the United Pentecostal Church International, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, and the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ. While these three are the largest such groups, there are many others.

Traditionally, most Apostolic Pentecostal denominations, like most Pentecostal churches in general, have been unfriendly to glbtq people. Like most Pentecostal churches, most Apostolic Pentecostal denominations teach that homosexuality is a sin. Often, homosexual members of these denominations are forced to leave the churches, or are subjected to counseling and even quasi-exorcisms in an attempt to alter their sexuality.

The typical hostile Pentecostal attitude toward homosexuality may be summed up by the following resolution issued by the United Pentecostal Church International: "Inasmuch as some segments of liberal Christianity have expressed a willingness to accept the so-called 'gay rights' movement as a legitimate lifestyle, and Whereas the inerrant, inspired Word of God emphatically declares, in Romans chapter I, homosexuality to be vile, unclean, unnatural, unseemly, and an abomination in the sight of God, and Whereas the United Pentecostal Church International is a fundamental Bible-believing organism entrusted with a divine destiny to provide spiritual direction to a wayward world, Let us therefore resolve that the United Pentecostal Church International go on public record as absolutely opposed to homosexuality and condemn it as a moral decadence and sin, and do hereby encourage prayer for the deliverance of those enslaved by that satanic snare."

However, in recent decades a number of affirming Pentecostal churches have emerged.

## **Affirming Apostolic Organizations**

In 1980, the first glbtq-affirming Apostolic organization was started in Schenectady, N. Y. Founded by William H. Carey, this group was called the National Gay Pentecostal Alliance.

NGPA opened its first local church in Omaha, Nebraska in 1981, and held its first ordination service in August of that year. The first three ministers were Carey, E. Samuel Stafford, and Frances Cervantes.

Over the next twenty years, churches were opened in various cities around the United States, and churches in Nigeria and Ukraine joined the movement.

Early in the twenty-first century, NGPA changed its name to Apostolic Restoration Mission. While still an affirming organization, they felt the need to reach out more to the straight community, believing that sexual orientation and gender identity should be non-issues in the church.

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, other affirming Apostolic organizations were founded. These include Reconciling Pentecostals International (headquartered

in LaPorte, Indiana, with 3 affiliated churches and 4 unaffiliated churches with RPI pastors); the Global Alliance of Affirming Apostolic Pentecostals (headquartered in Thonotassa, Florida, with 10 churches in the United States, and others in Canada, Australia, and Uganda); and the Affirming Pentecostal Church (headquartered in Indianapolis).

These organizations are committed to the belief, as formulated by the Affirming Pentecostal Church, that "gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation are irrelevant to our relationship with God. In God's eyes, both in Christ's body and in Heaven, there is neither male nor female. We believe that God is no respecter of persons in the forming of marriages. We believe that God's ideal for sexual expression is that it be only between two people, both of lawful age, both fully consenting, unrelated, and united by love in partnership."

The original organization, Apostolic Restoration Mission, merged with the Global Alliance of Affirming Apostolic Pentecostals. Rev. Carey, however, did not remain with that organization, and instead helped to found the Affirming Pentecostal Church.

### **Affirming Pentecostal Church**

As of 2011, the Affirming Pentecostal Church, which was founded on December 5, 2010, in Indianapolis, is the largest LGBT-affirming Apostolic denomination in the world, with 21 churches and several missions in the United States, West Africa, Wales, Kosovo, Ukraine, and Albania.

Rev. Rafael DeJesus serves as Senior Bishop, while Rev. Kevin Konkle and Rev. Nate Morales serve as Associate Bishops. Temporal authority, however, is vested in the General Board.

The church holds four conferences a year and sponsors a Bible college, the Apostolic Institute of Ministry. This institution exists for the purpose of providing APC ministers and student ministers with a quality education, offering classes in theology, history, eschatology, church administration, and more. In addition, the school offers teaching seminars at APC churches as needed.

The Affirming Pentecostal Church prides itself on being open to everyone. Its anti-discrimination policy includes numerous categories, most notably, race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

The following U.S. congregations are affiliated with the Affirming Pentecostal Church: True Love Apostolic Church, Indianapolis; Family Worship Center Affirming Pentecostal Church, South Bend, Ind.; Refuge of Hope Church, Penndel, Pa.; Nehemiah Tabernacle, Philadelphia; Refuge of Hope Church, Neptune, N. J.; High Praises International Ministries, Chicago; Abundant Life Tabernacle, Rockford, Ill.; Hope of the Rockies Affirming Pentecostal Church, Palmer Lake, Colo.; Open Door Community Church, Las Vegas; True Love Church, Orlando; Grace For All Church, Terre Haute; Point of Grace Apostolic Church, Charleston, W. V.; Emmanuel Apostolic Temple, Ferndale, Mich; Gulf Coast Worship Center, New Orleans; and All Nations Assembly, Memphis.

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### **About the Author**

**Reverend William H. Carey** founded the first LGBT-affirming Apostolic Pentecostal denomination, the National Gay Pentecostal Alliance, in 1980. He currently serves as Director of Apostolic Education for the Affirming Pentecostal Church, and is the Assistant Pastor of Emmanuel Apostolic Temple in Ferndale, Michigan, where he makes his home with his husband, Larry.