

# The Hierarchical Church Government

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by Brenda Stidham

## Questions

- 1) Does your local church deed have the name Church of God in Christ on it?
- 2) Did your local church submit a national report last April at the April Call meeting?
- 3) Has your local church ever submitted a national report at any April Call meeting?
- 4) Did you or someone from your local church go to Memphis and participate in the April or November meeting?
- 5) Does your local church bank account have the name Church of God in Christ on it?
- 6) Does the sign or marquee on your local church building read Church of God in Christ?

### **If you answered yes to any of these questions, read the following.**

One jurisdictional bishop in Kansas obtained a ruling in 1999 from the Kansas Appellate Court which he and others are now interpreting gives the Church of God in Christ national organization title and possession to all local churches real property. This decision was not revealed to the local brethren in Kansas until the winter of 2005 and it is doubtful if the brotherhood throughout the Church of God in Christ is aware of this decision and its potential impact on all local churches. The case surface when a local jurisdictional bishop took a local church to court to oust them from the property they had purchased and were regularly using for worship services. The local jurisdictional bishop's interpretation of this case flies in the face of everything that the brethren at large have been told and believe about the ownership of local church property.

We do not agree or embrace this interpretation as we believe the Church of God in Christ, is a **hybrid church system** of government.

( 992 P2d. 812 )

Church of God in Christ, New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ, and  
Kansas Southwest Church of God in Christ

V

Board Of Trustees Of New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ,  
Essie Witherspoon, Napoleon Devorce, James Witherspoon,  
Hosea Cohens, and Ulysses Washington

The above cited case is significant for every local church in the Church of God in Christ, especially all local churches in the state of Kansas for the following reasons:

This case made a factual finding that the relationship between the local New Jerusalem Church and the Church of God in Christ was in the format of a hierarchical organization. In a hierarchical organization local churches are subservient to the national church. Local churches that are a part of a hierarchical church hold property in trust for the benefit of the national church; in other words property purchased by a local church belongs to the national church not the local church. In a hierarchical system of church government it does not matter that a local church purchased or built the local church property without any financial contribution (s) from the national church or from the district church. Courts have rejected the argument that a local church always has the right to control its own property even when neither the general church nor the district church contributed to the acquisition of the local church property. This case states that local churches who desire to remain independent of the influence of the national church and control their local property must maintain this independence in the important aspects of its operations such as the form of government in the religious denomination, the name use and financial participation. **If your local church has the name Church of God in Christ on its deed, its sign or its bank account (s) and if your local church makes financial reports to the national church, the jurisdiction or the district church; then your church has failed to maintain its independence and in doing so has purchased or**

**constructed your local property for the use and benefit of the national church.** In a hierarchical system of government courts have stated that the moment property is conveyed and the name Church of God in Christ is placed on the deed, it does not matter if your local name precedes the name or phrase Church of God in Christ the property then becomes subject to policies and procedures of the national church. And in this case the Kansas Court made a factual finding that the Church of God in Christ is hierarchical like the Catholic Church.

In a hierarchical system of church government, the courts state that “an implied trust is created by implication of law based upon the presumed intention of the parties or based upon principles independent of the intention of the parties”.

**The local churches have verbally been told that the local church property is held in trust for the use and benefit of the local church; however the Official Draft of the Constitutional Convention Proposed Amendments Church of God in Christ-General Assembly (Blue Ribbon Committee) Article III, Part II-Ecclesiastical Structure page 2 reads “Ecclesiastically, the Church of God in Christ, a hierarchical organization”.**

Local churches can easily be enslaved under a hierarchical system of government. Under a hierarchical system of government it is virtually impossible for local churches to maintain the authority and power to possess and control real property. Based upon the local bishop’s interpretation of this case members of a hierarchical system of government forfeit their real property to the national or parent church once the name Church of God in Christ is put on the deed; in spite of the fact that neither the national or jurisdictional church made any financial contribution to assist in the purchase or construction of the local church property.

In a hierarchical system whenever there is a real or fictitious controversy between the national and local church the national church owns the real property. The courts have decided when church related controversies involve property rights the courts will take jurisdiction and decide the merits of the case to determine the issue of ownership and use of the property.

If you attempt to withdraw or sever your relations with the national church and the Church of God in Christ is determined to be hierarchical, real property purchased by the local church remains with the national church. It does not matter if the property is acquired by gift, deed, will or any other transfer or conveyance.

To verbally say or officially decree, local property is held in trust for the use and benefit of the local church and simultaneously officially decree that the church is hierarchical is deceitful in light of this case; knowing that the local churches are encouraged to use the name Church of God in Christ, that they are taught and urged to make financial reports to the national church and to their respective jurisdictions and districts; as well as the requirement that local churches adhere to the form of government prescribed by the national church.

For the national church to say join us, purchase or construct your own property with your own finances, make use of our name, make financial reports to the national, jurisdiction and district church, adhere to our system of government and we will protect the local members from unscrupulous individuals who would have you pay for the local property and then take it away from you. We give you the local church, our promise that the local church property is held in trust for the use and benefit of the local church. We expressly state in the Constitutional Convention Proposed Amendments paragraph 9, page 13 that “The said property is held in trust for the use and benefit of the members of the local Church of God in Christ...and the title of said property shall remain in the name of the local assembly” yet we simultaneously decree on page 2, of the Constitutional Convention Proposed Amendments that the Church of God in Christ is hierarchical, **this is likened to the double minded man that is unstable in all his ways**. The church’s written proposed amendments and its verbally proclaimed position adopt varying conflicting positions with respect to the same issue. **Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing, sweet water and bitter, these things ought not so to be ( James 1:8 & 3:10-11).**

As a reminder the courts have already decided when church related controversies involve property rights the courts will take jurisdiction and

decide the merits of the case to determine the issue of use and ownership of property. This case as well as the national church endeavor to officially adopt a hierarchical system of church government, commissions the Church of God in Christ to operate as a thief. The church must do a better job in decreeing its official position on the matter of ownership and use of local church property.

This Kansas case (Church of God in Christ, New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ and Kansas Southwest Church of God in Christ v. Board of Trustees of New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ), initiated and obtained by the jurisdictional prelate of Kansas Southwest Church of God in Christ, is a bad legal decision for all local churches in the Church of God in Christ.

All or most local churches in the Church of God in Christ are at risk. None of the local churches are safe for all or most have adhered and adhere to the prescribed form of government in the church, all or most have made financial reports to either Memphis, their respective jurisdiction or district, all or most operate under the leadership of a jurisdictional bishop and district superintendent all or most have the name Church of God in Christ on their bank account (s) and all or most make use of the name Church of God in Christ on their deed or church sign presenting the local church as a member of the Church of God in Christ.

This case decision must be brought to naught in Jesus name as it contravenes the Bible specifically Deuteronomy 28:30 (b), which reads **thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein:** According to the scripture for one to build a house and another other than the builder to sit down or remain in authority over the builder or sit down in authority against the builder is under the curse. **And pursuant to Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.** Local churches are not told that upon becoming a member of the Church of God in Christ, they forfeit their real property or forfeit real property later acquired. Local pastors are not told that their local church will be penalized upon affiliating with or joining the Church of God in Christ, no one informs them that their local church property now belongs to the national church not the local church.

**If you think that this local jurisdictional bishop's interpretation of this case does not affect you because your local church property is not in Kansas; you should be aware that one of the jurisdictional bishop's witnesses in his ( the bishop's ) efforts to oust the local church from their local church property was Elder Enoch Perry, Chief Counsel for the Church of God in Christ.**