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## Another Fracture Racks the Worldwide Church of God

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Already shaken by defections and the formation of breakaway churches in a battle over doctrine, the Pasadena-based Worldwide Church of God reeled Wednesday from yet another fracture, as a group of its highest-ranking pastors organized a new denomination called the United Church of God.

The new church—announced at the close of a four-day conference in Indianapolis—will be headed by David Hulme of Pasadena, who resigned from the Worldwide church two weeks ago after 23 years with the group as an evangelist and director of its Ambassador Performing Arts Foundation.

Although other groups of dissidents have left to form breakaway

churches—including the Global Church of God and the Philadelphia Church of God—the latest development was viewed as a major setback to the Worldwide Church of God's efforts to stem the flow of members and money.

Earlier this year, the church reported a dramatic drop in income from member tithes, the exodus of more than 10,000 of the church's 92,000 members and the cancellation of next year's Ambassador Auditorium concert series because the church could no longer afford to pay its \$2.5-million annual subsidy.

The crisis, building for the past several years, erupted into a public schism last year when the Worldwide Church of God repudiated the longtime teachings of its founder, the late Herbert W. Armstrong, and announced doctrinal changes that brought the church closer to the Protestant

mainstream.

The new doctrine embraced mainstream Christian concepts of the Trinity, emphasized salvation through the grace of God alone and not through good deeds and declared that tithing and observing the Sabbath were no longer mandatory.

Although members of the Worldwide Church of God considered themselves Christians before the doctrinal reforms, they did not observe Christmas or Easter. They still do not formally celebrate those holidays, but the prohibition against such observances no longer is enforced—a move that has upset many old-line members.

"Irreconcilable doctrinal differences have brought the church to the brink of destruction," dissidents involved in the Indianapolis meeting wrote. "Many ministers and brethren find themselves no longer able to fellowship in good conscience

with a church which has abandoned many of its core beliefs."

Armstrong, who founded the church in 1933 and made Pasadena its headquarters, brought it world renown with his prophecies about the end of the world. "The World Tomorrow" broadcasts and the church's "Plain Truth" magazine. Armstrong died in 1986.

In Pasadena, Worldwide Church of God spokesman Tom Lapacka estimated Wednesday that the new United Church of God will attract more than 100 of the church's pastors. There were 350 pastors in the Worldwide Church of God as of February, but 104 have since resigned or been terminated because they cannot accept the church's movement toward mainstream Christianity, church officials said.

"Obviously, every time we lose a member or minister, it grieves us," Lapacka said.

Sources said a last-minute attempt at compromise would have allowed ministers to continue teaching the old doctrines in Worldwide congregations, side by side with pastors who teach the new doctrines. It was rejected by the mother's church's hierarchy.

The leader of the Worldwide Church of God, Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach Sr., had warned members in an April 17 "emergency letter" to expect the new fissure. He charged the dissidents involved in the new United Church of God of long plotting the "rebellion" and accused them of "unethical, divisive behavior."

Directors of the new United Church of God include six of the Worldwide Church of God's 14 regional pastors. Before the six resigned, they had jurisdiction over nearly half of the Worldwide Church of God's local congregations in the United States.

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