



Defining “Apostle”

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Trinity Fellowship Association of Churches

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The Apostolic Movement

God is establishing his order for the church on the earth in a new way. The early church was birthed by the power of the Holy Spirit and led by apostolic men and women who were related to and appointed by Jesus. These apostolic figures parented local church leaders through relational connections.

Apostolic History in the Church

For nearly a century the apostolic movement consisted of Jewish leaders headquartered first in Jerusalem and then in major cities like Antioch, Ephesus and Rome. Their rigorous discipleship and oral tradition stewarded the words of Jesus the Messiah until the New Testament was compiled and the canon was completed.

The next wave of leadership were spiritual parents in key churches who were relationally connected to local church leaders as bishops. These early church shepherds – following the teachings of Peter, Paul, James & John – invested themselves into local leaders offering them the encouragement, direction, support, and the resources they needed to grow their churches. Through their relational connection, they were received as being appointed by the Lord for their service as his gift to the church (Ephesians 4:11).

Over time the relational structure of the church was replaced with a formalized structure. For generations in the western church, the Roman Catholic Church system served this function. In the east, the Orthodox Church did the same.

Then came the early reformers within the church followed by the Reformation in Europe, and the birth of the Protestant denominations. Corporate church councils connected to local churches through regional leaders and serving local pastors. At the same time, the church splintered into numerous denominations.

While clearly much fruit has been produced by these systems, many denominations have experienced a natural life cycle where they have peaked and suffered decline. Many have run their course and failed to conquer the enemy of all human systems: *increasing scale*. As they grew and expanded, the effective execution of their core mission was smothered by church bureaucracy, tradition, leadership gaps, internal politics, and even – on occasion – corruption.

In the last century, these factors caused many leaders to start churches outside of existing denominations with structures that give local congregations the autonomy and freedom to grow into new expressions of church life. This resulted in the rise of many independent churches and some church movements formed around the new independent expression.

Now, while independent churches are free from denominational system struggles, they face other spiritual and organizational challenges. Cut off from the vital resources provided by historic denominations and their seminaries, these non-denominational churches must forge their own way leaving many local church leaders isolated.

The Modern Apostolic Movement

The modern apostolic movement looks to provide relational connection and resources for both the non-denominational churches in this generation as well as connecting denominational churches underserved by their institutional structure. While it does not rise to the level of the Apostles who walked with Jesus and in his departure laid the foundation for the Church, the Apostles of today are a gift from Jesus to the church and its leaders. Their function is to serve the church while freeing it from the controlling limitations of old denominational systems. This current apostolic movement simultaneously values the authority of the local church while seeking to provide key resources necessary to promote health and growth in the church and its members.

Messianic congregations have recognized this same need. A new generation of messianic leaders see the importance of a functioning apostolic ministry among believers in Israel and the diaspora.

Churches working together in an apostolic network get the best of both worlds. Senior pastors are free to hear God and execute their specific mission in unity with their local elders while having broad access to peer relationships, resources, fatherly guidance, and accountability. In addition, they have a relational resource to call upon when embroiled in conflict within the church leadership or confronted with moral failure. This allows Pastors to focus on enculturating the Gospel into their specific faith community as they manage their own local distinctions in their context. An apostolic network allows these pastors to execute local vision with broad-based, Kingdom support.

Doctrinal issues aside, unpacking the purpose of prior apostolic systems reveals four key apostolic elements that denominational leaders sought to provide the local pastor: relational connection, structure, resources, blessing and sending.

1. Relational Connection

Relationship is a broad term. In the context of apostolic relationships, the proper stewardship of spiritual authority is a key part of healthy networks. The father, or parent,

metaphor is often – and very accurately – used. A good spiritual leader should reflect God’s love, support, and unqualified acceptance. As a loving representative of God, they provide a shoulder to cry on, a steady hand in trying times, a hand of friendship, an ear and voice of counsel, and sage advice as needed. Also, they are there to give a deserved “well done!” and a needed “knock it off!” that provides encouragement and guidance. Their strength is a deep well that refreshes any leader - feeding confidence, faith, and boldness into their leadership. In our generation, other relational constructs accurately depicting the role of the apostolic relationship include coach, consultant, and big brother.

The key to the apostolic relationship and influence in every case is the healthy expression of the apostolic relationship. Healthy relationships are fostered by honesty, trust, and regular interaction. They are open-handed, and servant based. They are formed by intentional, mutual investment by both parties.

2. Structure

Human systems function based on intelligent structure and design. Without it chaos ensues. Many of the Apostle Paul’s writings provided the local church with a blueprint for local churches that help implement that necessary structure. Good apostolic systems provide local churches with systems, processes and structures needed to effectively run their ministry. Churches need both the power of God’s presence and the structural form that provides order to its ministry expression. Church growth is often limited, not by lack of the move of God in its midst, but by the lack of structure to effectively steward the move.

3. Resources

The local church leader is called upon to lead and grow their church. But often their vision is shaped by the reality of limited resources – limited time, limited talent, and limited finances. These limits shape decision making, regulate growth rates, and impact the development of strategies for the work. An apostolic network seeks to help the local leader maximize these resources and provide additional expertise when necessary.

4. Blessing & Sending

Apostles “send” individuals and teams with the blessing of God. The concept of spiritual covering and blessing is often negated in the modern church; yet, the biblical pattern of blessing and sending clearly was a function of the Apostles. Acts 13:3 (NLT): “So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.” Further, the author of Hebrews encourages us to not neglect the “laying on of hands.” (Hebrews 6:2)

Many ministries, churches, and causes are inspired by God, planned by man, and launched with enthusiasm yet ultimately fail to reach their full potential due to lack of

apostolic blessing and sending. The blessing of God transferred through the Laying on of Hands is clearly a biblical precursor to effectiveness.

Historical Definition of “Apostle”

The word “apostle” was in secular use in the Greek world before Jesus made it a biblical term referring to the twelve disciples. (Luke 6:13) It was originally used for seafaring expeditions where Apostles were sent out to represent and do business for another person, group or entity.

It was later used in a broader sense for legal representatives of governments and others who were sent out to act on behalf of another. When Jesus designated the original twelve disciples as “Apostles” he was using a culturally common concept. The twelve disciples were to be sent out by Jesus to represent Him wherever they went and to act on behalf of his interests and those of the Kingdom of God.

The Hebrew word "shaliach" had the same meaning as "apostle". A shaliach was "sent out" as an agent of a governor or a merchant. For example, the Sanhedrin would send a shaliach into the nations to collect the temple tax from Jews abroad. This agent would be "commissioned" to act as the legal representative of the Temple authorities.

The Nature of Apostles

- Apostles are first and foremost stewards. Everything an Apostle possesses related to their mission on behalf of Christ is given to him *by* God and for which they are accountable *to* God.
- Apostles are sent specifically to grow, guide, guard and govern the Church. Beginning with the original twelve Apostles and then extending to the Ephesians 4 role of Apostle - the church has always been designed to function under apostolic authority and governance.
- Apostles *grow* churches by providing informed insight and subject-matter expertise. They *guide* by being a source of wise counsel. They *guard* through intercession and leadership accountability. They *govern* by speaking into the senior leaders and elder boards through a relationally based, apostolic connection.
 - Ephesians 2:19–22 (NKJV)
Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- Apostles are servants of the Church appointed by Christ. The list of appointments in Ephesians 4 – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher – is often interpreted as a list of gifts similar to Paul’s listings found in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The latter passages translate the Greek word *charismata* as *gift*. The text in Ephesians 4 is quite different. Ephesians 4 use *dídōmi* meaning to “give, grant, appoint, to assign a person to a task as a particular benefit to others.” Christ *appoints individuals to these roles* as a gift to the CHURCH not to the individual believer. The appointment is for the purpose of equipping the body of Christ.
 - Ephesians 4:11–15 (NKJV)

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...

The noun “Apostle” refers to a specific person operating in the Ephesians 4 role. The adjective “apostolic” refers to the activity of an Apostle as well as those who are a part of their mission. For example, the TFAC Network is an apostolic mission of Trinity Fellowship Church and all who serve in it are serving an apostolic function. But they are not all appointed to the role of being an Apostle.

The early church began with the role of Apostle guiding it and, in that state, it exploded with dynamic and healthy growth. However, by the fourth century apostolic authority was replaced by government imposed ecclesiastical structure that killed it. Apostolic relationship with the local church was replaced by institutional allegiance and non-relational hierarchy.

In differing forms - the church at large has suffered for centuries because of non-biblical, non-apostolic governance. But in the past forty years God has been awakening the church to the need for apostolic governance.

Definition of Apostle

An Apostle is a servant leader and a steward of Jesus appointed by Him with relational connection to a church and the church’s pastoral leader (1 Corinthians 9:2). Their gift of leadership exists to serve Jesus by serving his church. An Apostle is called to relationally care for the leaders of local churches in a humble and sacrificial manner. Apostles are fathers and friends of local churches and their pastors. Their authority is a gift to the church from God but only functions to the degree that their relationship with the local pastor is present and their gift is recognized and received.

Identifying the Apostolic Calling

The apostolic calling is identified not imparted. While some aspects of its expression may be taught, the fundamental identity of an Apostle is evident in the natural expression of personality, gifts, and ministry expression of their life. Some of the key indicators that the apostolic gift is functioning include:

1. A clear relational base with other pastors and community leaders.
2. A passion for evangelism expressed through efforts such as church planting, congregation growth and generational multiplication that influences a local community for the Kingdom of God.
3. A regional scope of vision that is larger than a single congregation or community of believers.
4. A burden for healthy structure, systems and order expressed through leadership.
5. The fruit of growing organizations that are reproducing and multiplying.
6. Character that is based in fathering, generosity, and a servant heart.
7. A leadership style grounded in love, looking to give not receive, and free from ambition or control.

When the apostolic role is functioning as it should, local churches grow in a healthy and sustainable manner, local church pastors feel loved, equipped and cared for, and the church at large grows dynamically and becomes a relevant and redeeming force around the world.

The Apostolic Function

The apostolic function exists to provide the local church – and more specifically the Senior Pastor – with eight key benefits:

1. Evangelism: Advancing the Kingdom of God by making disciples, planting churches and increasing congregational impact in a community. In the broad sense, evangelism is expressed through the manifestation of God's work in a local community resulting in multiplication of the local church.
2. Fathering/Coaching: The apostolic function is expressed as leaders in a formal, or at least clearly defined, oversight relationship engage with senior pastors. The father/coach provides encouragement, guidance, and – when necessary – correction as well as being a resource.
3. Governmental Backstop: The apostolic relationship provides local churches with a predefined, “go-to” expert in times of financial crisis, moral failure of senior leadership, or doctrinal heresy. For this function to be effective, relational connection between the Apostolic leader and the local congregation is critical.

4. Vision Clarity: Confirming, clarifying, and defining the scope of ministry while setting the church in order. The apostolic influence is often expressed through activities such as the ordination of the senior pastor, providing an annual church assessment, confirming gifts in the pastor, helping form and shape church government, and assisting in the elder selection process. The apostolic role works with the senior pastor ensuring their vision is in alignment with Kingdom DNA and helping him identify the traditions or cultural inconsistencies which are anti-Kingdom.
5. Order: Addressing issues of discipline, accusation, or unresolved disagreement when the church or the pastor is out of order. It is the role of the Apostle to give counsel and assistance to the pastor and through him to the broader leadership of the Church. Issues of order that may be addressed through apostolic input include legal challenges or concerns, rebellious factions in the church, crisis support, or emergency situations.
6. Equipping: Providing insight for consideration into major issues of vision implementation, the apostolic function contributes wisdom, subject matter expertise, and resources. Sharing from their wisdom and experience, apostolic leaders give advice on how to navigate important decisions. Apostolic influence is there to provide relational covering for major changes of direction, providing wisdom for implementation, managing crisis and sharing advice on financial issues such as debt and financing along with assistance in navigating key leadership transitions.
7. Accountability: The apostolic function speaks into the spiritual, emotional, and physical health and well-being of the Senior Pastor. The apostolic role provides a healthy backstop for the senior pastor and the governance team of the church. By giving advice, input, and guidance on issues that relate to pace of life, marriage, relationships, friends, compensation, and the work / life balance. The apostolic leader seeks through relational input to keep the pastor, their team and the church healthy. Additionally, the apostolic influence may be formally engaged in times of leadership crisis. Apostles should be formally empowered to invoke discipline, define appropriate restoration paths, and monitoring the restoration progress.
8. Blessing & Sending: The apostolic function confirms giftings, callings, and the timing of God. Through the Laying on of Hands, the Apostle sends individuals and teams into their God-given mission with his blessings and the associated resources of Heaven.

All expressions of the apostolic function are conducted through relational connections. The apostolic role is not that of a dogmatic, dominate, controlling overseer, but rather, is one of a loving parent who is genuinely concerned and actively involved in developing the fundamental health of the church and senior pastor.

The Apostolic Ethic

The ethic of the apostolic function is one of service and support. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the role of the Apostle is to be a gift – not a burden – to the local church. It is the abuses of the apostolic ethic in the execution of proper apostolic function that has caused many pastors to be leery of embracing apostolic influence. For the apostolic movement to progress, apostolic leaders must practice a healthy apostolic ethic including:

- Prioritized Relationship: Healthy apostolic influence is expressed through relationship not legal or organizational institutions. Apostolic leaders must choose to invest themselves into the people they are leading. For this reason, apostolic networks must be of a size and structure that allows the formation and nurture of personal relationships. These face-to-face connections do not happen in large group settings, through mass mailings, or at conferences. These connections occur over dinner, lengthy phone conversations and in one-on-one meetings. These relationships thrive in environments fostering healthy interactions founded upon mutual sharing, and they suffer under controlling, dominating, or manipulative oligarchies.
- Financial Independence: The motivation for the apostolic leader must be one of service to the local church not personal profit. While it is proper for churches to provide a level of financial support to their apostolic network, a mutual spirit of generosity should be a motivating virtue behind the relationship. If churches begin to feel that the network is a burden (a clear indication of their perception of the “value” they are receiving), the apostolic influence is negatively affected.
- Instructional Influence: Apostolic leaders should have relational influence not control over the churches in their networks. Their fatherly voice should be one of comfort, encouragement, and – when necessary – gentle correction. A demanding, harsh, controlling, or critical leader is the antithesis of healthy apostolic influence. The exception is in times of leadership crisis including financial problems, leadership moral failures, or heresy. In these instances explicit authority should be granted to the apostolic oversight.
- Servant Minded: Apostles have a sacrificial role serving the churches under their care and being present in the worst times. The apostolic role is expressed similarly to how fathers influence their adult, married children and coaches motivate teams. In fulfilling this role, Apostles are a gift to the church, offering their time, extending their influence, sharing their heart and giving of their resources freely without manipulation.
- Personal Accountability: The apostolic influence should be “in order” meaning it is under proper, spiritual accountability itself. Apostolic leaders should “practice

what they preach” submitting to proper governmental accountability and oversight of themselves.