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## Pentecostal Ministry and Ordination

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*This statement on Pentecostal ministry and ordination was approved as the official statement by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on August 3, 2009.*

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*Ministry* is the word most often used to identify the work of Christian clergy. In its biblical sense, however, *ministry* is a more comprehensive term that properly denotes the work of the whole church, the body of Christ in the world. Ministry is what the church does in obedience to the commands of her Lord.

Our English word *ministry* is commonly used to translate several words in the New Testament, the most prominent being *diakonia*<sup>1</sup> (“service, ministry”) and its related forms. The *diakonia* word group, including also the verb *diakoneō* (“to serve, minister”) and the noun *diakonos* (“servant, minister, deacon”), occurs about 100 times and denotes most basically the humble service one person renders to another. In New Testament times it was often the work of a servant who waited tables or fulfilled other menial tasks.

### Jesus—the Model for Our Ministry

Ministry in the New Testament is taught and modeled by Jesus Christ and can never be understood or realized apart from Him. Therefore, a biblical study of ministry may properly begin with the life and teachings of our Lord as presented in the New Testament.

Ministry is *incarnational*. In Jesus of Nazareth, God came to dwell among human beings. The Gospel of John affirms, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).<sup>2</sup> Matthew’s designation of the virgin-born Jesus as “Immanuel . . . ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23) teaches much the same. The Son of God took upon himself full humanity in order to draw near to His human creatures and secure their redemption through the atoning sacrifice of the Cross. As Paul expressed it, “God was [in Christ] reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Ministry is *kerygmatic*. Drawn from the noun *kērygma* (“proclamation”), this term highlights the central place of the preaching of the gospel. Nowhere is this more evident than in Jesus’ Nazareth sermon, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news (*euangelizomai*) to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim (*kērussō*) freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim (*kērussō*) the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18,19).

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<sup>1</sup> Where Greek terms are transliterated, for simplicity and consistency nouns will be in the nominative, singular and verbs will be present indicative, first person, singular.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture references and quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

Ministry is *carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit*. The Gospels strikingly depict the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at the outset of His ministry, immediately after His baptism and before His public activity (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). Peter described this event as an “anointing” which empowered Jesus for His work: “After the baptism that John preached ... God anointed (*chriō*) Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:37,38). Not infrequently Jesus himself referred to the power of the Spirit at work in His miracles (Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:14,18).

Ministry is *humble service*. In counteracting the self-serving instincts of the disciples, Jesus pointed to the nature of His own ministry: “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served (*diakoneō*), but to serve (*diakoneō*), and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Luke also reports Jesus’ words, “I am among you as one who serves (*diakoneō*)” (Luke 22:27). Nowhere is Jesus’ attitude better illustrated than at the Last Supper where He chastened His competitive followers: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).

Ministry is *shepherding*. Jesus depicted himself as a faithful and caring shepherd who knows each of His sheep and leads each out to water and pasture (cf. John 10:1-18). Never abusing or exploiting, the Good Shepherd interposes His own body between the sheep and all dangers. Repeatedly Jesus made the point, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11,15,17,18). Elsewhere in the New Testament He is called the “great Shepherd” (Hebrews 13:20), “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25), and the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4).

The ministry of Jesus culminated in His death which He willingly suffered as a substitutionary offering for the sins of humanity (Matthew 26:28; Mark 10:45). He gave himself, in life and death, for others.

### **The Church as the Extension of Christ’s Ministry**

The Gospels show that Jesus intended to extend His own ministry through the church which He himself would found and build (Matthew 16:18). One of His earliest actions was calling designated apostles “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14), as He did.

After His death and resurrection Christ explicitly commissioned the apostles to carry on His ministry. Claiming all authority in heaven and on earth, He charged them, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20).

Maintaining this emphasis, Luke records Jesus' prediction that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all nations. The disciples were to be His witnesses, and for that purpose they would shortly receive the promised heavenly power (Luke 24:46-49). John's Gospel describes Jesus' commission to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21). It was then Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22).

Awareness of a derived and continuing ministry moved the disciples to seek a replacement for Judas. Casting lots to distinguish between Barsabbas and Matthias, they prayed, "Lord ... show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs" (Acts 1:24,25). In selecting seven men to handle the social services of the Early Church, the apostles were conscious of the primacy of their ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). The central task of leadership in the Early Church was anointed proclamation (*kerygma*) of God's word to His people.

Participation in ministry was not limited to the Twelve, nor even to the larger group of apostles that included Paul, James, and perhaps others as well. Fellow workers of the apostles were readily called *diakonos* or "minister": Phoebe (Romans 16:1); Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21, NASB); Epaphras (Colossians 1:7; NRSV); Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6). Others are said to participate in *diakonia* or "ministry": the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16:15, NASB), Archippus (Colossians 4:17, NASB), and Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). Qualified elders were chosen and prayerfully commissioned for ministry in each new missionary church (Acts 14:23). Ministry, then, was not the sole prerogative of an apostolic or priestly elite to be passed down from generation to generation by a rite of apostolic succession. It was a pervasive and vibrant gift of the Spirit shaping and energizing leaders wherever the church was planted.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Ministry**

The necessity of a spiritual endowment for ministry is apparent in Jesus and the apostles. The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism was prerequisite to His ministry (Mark 1:9-13). Jesus specifically instructed the apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they had received the promised Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,5). Only after baptism in the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost were they thrust into public ministry. From that point, their ministries were carried out with a striking sense of the Spirit's power and wisdom. The Acts narrative demonstrates that Spirit baptism, followed by continual Spirit enablement, is essential to effective Christian ministry.

Paul's understanding of his own induction into ministry is revealing. "I became a servant (*diakonos*) of this gospel by the gift (*dōrea*) of God's grace (*charis*) given me through the working (*energeia*) of his power (*dunamis*)" (Ephesians 3:7). Paul was certainly conscious of being "called" (Romans 1:1). He also possessed excellent theological training (Acts 22:3). But in describing his ministry, it was far more natural for him to speak of an inner work of the Spirit, which in a supernatural way gifted him to be a minister of the gospel of Christ.

That same sense of sovereign supernatural action in the preparation of ministers is present in Paul's exhortations to the elders of Ephesus, as recounted in Acts, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (20:28). While in all probability Paul had been instrumental in the public ordination of these elders, he was deeply aware of a powerful prior work of the Spirit that their public "ordination" merely facilitated.

Historically the church has spoken of the divine summons to vocational ministry as a "call to the ministry." Indeed the Scriptures frequently indicate that God does summon individuals to devote their lives especially to His service. Abraham (Genesis 12:1), Moses (Exodus 3:6,10), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8,9) are Old Testament examples. In the New Testament Jesus personally called the Twelve (Mark 3:13,14), and the Holy Spirit prophetically separated Paul and Barnabas for their missionary assignment (Acts 13:2).

The Scriptures also support the church's traditional concept of an inward call, to describe the individual's personal awareness of a divine summons to ministry, and an outward call that attests to the church that God has indeed summoned the individual. But it must always be remembered that those who are called to the ministry are first supernaturally gifted by the Spirit to fulfill that call. Like Paul, they become ministers "by the gift (*dōrea*) of God's grace (*charis*) ... through the working (*energeia*) of his power (*dunamis*)" (Ephesians 3:7).

### **Spiritual Gifts for Ministry**

If ministry is indeed effected by the gifting and energy of the Spirit, then the New Testament emphasis on spiritual gifts assumes even greater significance. Paul, especially, urges attention to spiritual gifts. To the Corinthians he wrote, "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift (*charisma*) ..." (1 Corinthians 1:7). And to the Romans, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift (*charisma ... pneumatikon*) to make you strong ..." (1:11). Though in this last instance, Paul used the words *charisma* and *pneumatikon* together, his preferred term for spiritual gift is *charisma*. Less frequently, he also used the term *pneumatikon* which also means "spiritual gift" (1 Corinthians 12:1,28; 14:1).

A wide range of spiritual gifts effects and accompanies the multifaceted ministry already observed in the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles, with repeated emphasis upon the Spirit's powerful and wise direction of the Christian mission, with many signs and wonders, appears to be a kind of narrative theology of spiritual gifts.

The wider teaching of the New Testament letters points out that a special gift (or gifts) of the Spirit has been given to every believer to qualify him/her for one or more special ministries: "To *each one of us* grace (*charis*) was given according to the measure of Christ's gift (*dōrea*)" (Ephesians 4:7, NASB).

“We have different gifts (*charisma*), according to the grace (*charis*) given us” (Romans 12:6). “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). There is a similar emphasis in 1 Peter 4:10, “Each one should use whatever gift (*charisma*) he has received to serve (*diakoneō*) others, faithfully administering God’s grace (*charis*) in its various forms.” The writer to the Hebrews noted that “God testified to it [the salvation announced first by the Lord Jesus] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts (*merismos*, lit., “distribution, apportionment”) of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (2:4).

Several important lists of spiritual gifts, identified as such by the words *charisma*, *pneumatikon*, *dōma*, or *dōrea* are included in the New Testament. There are the familiar nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Several of these gifts are also found in the lists of Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, and Ephesians 4:11.

These nine gifts may easily be recognized as supernatural and spontaneous, always under the immediate control of the Spirit who uses obedient and sensitive believers in their manifestation. But sprinkled among the gift lists, and equally identified as *charisma*, *pneumatikos*, *dōma*, or *dōrea*, are other important spiritual gifts for carrying on the work of the church. They are serving (Romans 12:7), teaching (Romans 12:7), encouraging (Romans 12:8), giving (Romans 12:8), leadership (Romans 12:8), showing mercy (Romans 12:8), helping others (1 Corinthians 12:28), and administration (1 Corinthians 12:28). These gifts are not so readily recognized as supernatural but nonetheless have their origin and energy in the work of the Holy Spirit who sovereignly equips believers to be used regularly, energetically, and conscientiously in the service of the church.

Although the gifts that are listed probably cover most ministry needs of the church, there is no reason to think the New Testament writers intended to be comprehensive. For example, there is no reference to gifts of music, though the New Testament does mention “spiritual (*pneumatikon*) songs” (Ephesians 5:19). The Old Testament attributes gifts of craftsmanship to the Holy Spirit (Exodus 31:2,3). It is reasonable to think the Spirit grants other gifts to the church to meet specific needs. Paul, in fact, seemed at great pains to emphasize variety: “There are different kinds of gifts (*charisma*) ... different kinds of service (*diakonia*) ... different kinds of working (*energēma*)” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

In every case these gifts are set within the context of the church and designed for ministry to and through the body of Christ in its fulfillment of the Great Commission. Before noting the “different gifts” of Romans 12:6, Paul stressed the church's interdependence, “We who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5). The gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 are prefaced by a similar statement, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). The rationale for the gifts of Ephesians 4:11 is “to prepare God’s people for works of service (*diakonia*), so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12).

The purpose of spiritual gifts is most clearly expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is *given for the common good*.” Spiritual gifts are intended for the upbuilding of the congregation at large. Their only justification is to serve the purposes of Christ in His church, a lesson lost on the immature Corinthians who demeaned the gifts by their own proud exhibitionism.

It is also to be emphasized that just as the Spirit comes upon all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ without respect to ethnicity, age, or sex, so spiritual gifts, the essential tools of ministry, are bestowed upon all. The implications for the ministry of women, especially, must not be ignored.

### **Ministry Belongs to the Entire Church**

Our study of ministry and spiritual gifts makes it clear that ministry is the work of the entire body of Christ, not just of a special priestly or clerical caste. Even the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher do not exist as ends in themselves or as rewards for a special elite. They are expressly given “to prepare God’s people for works of service (*diakonia*), so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12).

Every member of the body of Christ participates in the ministry of the church; all are called in some way to be ministers. To be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into the ministry of His church. No group of leaders alone can embody the full spectrum of spiritual gifts and provide all the wisdom and energy required to do the work of the church. The ministry of the congregation at large is integral to the accomplishment of the mission of the church.

Spiritual gifting for ministry is also without regard to race or sex. Wherever the church exists, the Holy Spirit pours out His gifts “and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11). Spiritual gifts are bestowed as widely as the blessing of salvation in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Consequently there is no scriptural basis for excluding any believer from the gifting of the Holy Spirit. “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy .... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17,18, from Joel 2:28,29). Both the teachings and the historical examples of the New Testament show that women and men of various ethnic backgrounds were granted spiritual gifts for the ministry of the church.

## Ordination as Recognition of Spiritual Leadership

A strong biblical doctrine of the ministry of the laity may at first appear to diminish the necessity and importance of an ordained clergy, those who are specially set apart for the leadership of the church. To the contrary, it actually heightens the need, for the laity must be spiritually formed, trained, and led on a massive scale if the mission of the church is to be accomplished. Scripture emphasizes that ministry leaders are Christ's gifts (*dōma*) for the explicit purpose of preparing the people of God for their ministries of building up the church (Ephesians 4:7-12).

The selection and preparation of spiritual leaders is a crucial matter throughout the New Testament. Jesus' appointment and nurture of the first apostles provided servant-leaders who exercised a vital leadership role in the Early Church. The Twelve were also aided by men like Stephen (Acts 6), Philip (Acts 8), and Barnabas (Acts 13), whom the Spirit singularly marked out for leadership in advancing the mission of the church. These and others are to be found among an expanding leadership group in the New Testament.

Paul and Barnabas were careful to appoint elders for leadership in each new church (Acts 14:23). For that appointment, Luke used a verb (*cheirotoneō*) which means "to choose, to appoint or elect by raising hands." Thus the congregations may well have had a part in the selection, as in the choice of the "seven" in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6). These appointments were made in a context of prayer, fasting, and apparently with some kind of public "ordination" service.

Divine initiative in the appointment of spiritual leaders is basic to New Testament theology. Instructing his churches, Paul wrote, "And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28, NASB).

First, note that these "offices" (or "ministries") are of divine origin. Second, they are arranged in specific order—first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then Spirit-gifted individuals with a wide array of spiritual gifts, both miraculous (e.g., "healing" and "tongues") and functional (e.g., "administration") Third, all these ministries are charismatic in nature, in that they are granted and energized as specific gifts of God by His Spirit. Fourth, the ministries of both the "leaders" and the "led," the "pastors" and the "parishioners," flow from the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts.

Paul wrote in much the same way in his letter to Ephesus. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). These ministries are not provided by human initiative but by the grace (*charis* [4:7]) of the risen Lord Jesus Christ who "gave gifts (*dōma*) to men" (4:8). Moreover, Christ's gifts of ministry leaders are granted "to prepare God's people for works of service (*diakonia*), so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12,13).

## Ordination of Ministry Leaders

The selection of spiritual leaders throughout Scripture is normally recognized in a public way that signifies the spiritual origins of the call. In the Old Testament, a formal anointing with oil, bringing with it the power of the Spirit, accompanied God's selection. Jesus purposefully drew the 12 disciples aside and appointed them to be apostles (Mark 3:13-19). Judas' successor was prayerfully and publicly chosen (Acts 1:15-22). When the seven deacons were chosen, the apostles prayed and "laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6). Similarly, the Spirit announced his choice of Paul and Barnabas for missionary service, a choice followed by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands (Acts 13:2,3).

Paul's letters to Timothy, who represents a younger generation of ministers, imply a kind of formal ordination. At some unidentified point, Paul and a body of elders laid hands on Timothy to set him apart for the ministry. The work of the Spirit in Timothy's ordination is also noteworthy, "Do not neglect your gift (*charisma*), which was given you through a prophetic message (*prophēteia*) when the body of elders laid their hands on you" (1 Timothy 4:14). Moreover, Paul continued to mentor his young colleague, "fan into flame the gift (*charisma*) of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).

The practice of selecting and "ordaining" qualified elders, crucial to the success of the missionary churches, became a strategic step for Paul's ministry team. Following the pattern of his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23), Paul commanded Titus, charged with setting the churches of Crete in order, "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). Timothy, likewise, had as a part of his ministry similar tasks in the appointment and supervision of elders (1 Timothy 5:17-22).

### Essential Qualifications for Ministry Leadership

The selection of ministry leaders was not lightly undertaken. It was a matter of careful and prayerful deliberation.

The Pastoral letters include specific, if rather basic, qualifications for elders. The qualifications have to do with spiritual maturity and godliness, public credibility, a faithful marriage,<sup>3</sup> a well-managed and respectful family, personal temperance and discipline, hospitality, and teaching ability (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Elders and overseers (essentially synonymous terms here) were to be godly leaders whom others could look up to. In the contemporary context, two aspects of these qualifications stand out.

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<sup>3</sup> Not all early ministers were married, e.g., the apostle Paul.  
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First, Christian ministers must be respected in their communities: “He must also have a good reputation (*marturia kalē*) with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap” (1 Timothy 3:7). In the same vein, “the overseer must be above reproach (*anepilēptos*)” (1 Timothy 3:2), and “An elder must be blameless (*anenklētos*) ...” (Titus 1:6). By inference, believers who have a bad reputation prior to conversion must live down that reputation over a certain period of time and reestablish themselves in the community as mature Christians respected because of their redeemed character and service. Concern for outsiders is frequently reinforced in the New Testament (Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12,15).

Second, Christian ministers are not to be immature, unproven leaders. As Paul put it, “He must not be a recent convert (*neophytos*), or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). Reinforcing his concern for maturity, Paul gave Timothy four directives regarding elders (1 Timothy 5:17-22), the last being, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands [i.e., in “credentialing”] ...” (5:22). To hastily and ill-advisedly choose one who later proves to be unfaithful might be to “share in the sins of others” (5:22).

### **Titles for Spiritual Leaders**

Several key designations for church leaders are used in the New Testament. It should be observed that these titles appear to be functional and charismatic in nature. There is no hint of rigid hierarchical and authoritarian offices to be passed in some kind of apostolic succession.

*Apostle.* The foundational importance of the apostle (*apostolos*) is reflected in Ephesians 2:20, where the church is said to be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” The New Testament does not directly answer the question as to whether the apostolic office survives today. Nor are there specific instructions as to the selection and qualification of apostles, as there are for other offices as overseers/elders and deacons.

Discussions about a contemporary role of apostles should observe that the only scriptural qualifications mentioned in the New Testament are: (1) personal training with Jesus during the whole of His earthly ministry (Acts 1:22), and/or (2) a personal appearance of the risen Christ and a summons from Him, as in the cases of Paul and James, the Lord's brother (1 Corinthians 15:3-7, cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1). In addition, Paul specifically, in his struggle with false apostles, pointed out, “The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles ...” (2 Corinthians 12:12).

The apostles were to be personal witnesses of the life and teachings of the historical Jesus and especially of His death and resurrection (Luke 24:48; Acts 2:32). To fulfill this important function, they were given a special promise: “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit ... will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Accordingly, the apostles became the authoritative teachers of the Early Church, conveying and safeguarding divine revelation which came to be written down as the New Testament canon. If apostles are to be named in the church today, their continuity with the first apostles lies in their specially gifted leadership in evangelism and discipleship among the people of God. Unlike their biblical forebears, they would have seen neither the risen Christ nor written Scripture.

*Prophet.* The prophet (*prophētēs*) also had an important foundational role in the Early Church (Ephesians 2:20). Some, if not all, apostles were numbered among the prophets (cf. Saul in Acts 13:1). So were Judas and Silas who “said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers” (Acts 15:32), indicative of a positive, upbuilding, and encouraging ministry. The writer of the Revelation, traditionally understood to be the apostle John, identified himself (only) as a prophet (Revelation 1:3; 22:9, etc.). Barnabas, Simeon, and Manaen were also among the prophets (Acts 13:1). The gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:10), however, was broadly diffused in the Early Church. In Acts, Agabus (11:28,29; 21:10,11) is a notable prophet as are Philip’s four unmarried daughters (Acts 21:8,9). As a gift of the Spirit (*charisma*), prophecy was a common experience of the laity (1 Corinthians 14:1,5,39) and is to continue, with proper biblical guidelines (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

*Evangelist.* The ministry of the evangelist (*euangelistēs*, Ephesians 4:11) as mentioned in the New Testament, is not well defined. Philip was known as “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8) and Paul commanded Timothy, clearly an elder and pastor, to do the *work* of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) as one of the duties of his ministry. The term itself implies the proclamation of the *euangelion*, the good news of the saving acts of God in Christ. The New Testament evangelist was probably more akin to a missionary who preaches regularly among unreached peoples than to an itinerant minister who preaches regularly to the faithful.

*Teacher.* The ministry of the teacher (*didaskalos*) is listed third in 1 Corinthians 12:28, superseded only by apostles and prophets who themselves were teachers (Acts 2:42). Teaching is a spiritual gift (*charisma*, Romans 12:7) granted to ministers and laypersons, the Holy Spirit himself being the divine teacher who anoints the people of God to perceive the truth (1 John 2:20,27). So teachers were those uniquely equipped by knowledge and spiritual charisma to instruct the congregation in doctrine, ethics, and Christian experience. Elders, whose work was teaching as well as preaching, were especially highly esteemed (1 Timothy 5:17). In Ephesians 4:11 pastors and teachers are linked together, many scholars referring to them as “pastor-teacher.” No mere purveyors of ideas, New Testament teachers taught to achieve spiritual formation.

*Pastors, Overseers, and Elders.* The term *pastor*, found only in Ephesians 4:11 [in English translation], is the Greek *poimēn* and means “shepherd.” The shepherding role (verb, *poimainō*) is often attributed to Christian ministers (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), following the model of Christ himself (John 10:14; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4).

Two somewhat interchangeable terms used for pastoral leadership roles in the Early Church are *overseer* (*epískopos*) and *elder* (*presbyteros*). Note that Paul told the “elders” of Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff.) that the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers” (*epískopos*) to “shepherd,” i.e. “pastor” (*poimainō*), the church of God. The two terms appear to be synonymous also in Titus 1:5-7 where Paul spoke of the appointment of “elders” and gave the qualification of “overseers.” *Elders*, *overseers*, and *pastors*, then, appear to be essentially equivalent terms, with each term implying some unique aspect of the leader's role. In every case, however, the terms apply to those set apart as leaders of the church, not to laypersons.

As to derivation, *overseer* (*epískopos*) emphasizes the function of leadership or supervision. The verb is commonly rendered by such terms as “see to it,” “care for,” “oversee,” “see after.” *Elder* (*presbyteros*) signifies greater age, hence greater wisdom and more extensive experience, and was a common title for Jewish civil and religious leaders. Ministries encompassed by these terms may well include the spiritual gifts of “leadership” (*proistēmi*) (Romans 12:8) and “administration” (*kybernēsis*) (1 Corinthians 12:28).

*Deacons.* The word *deacon* (*diakonos*) is used widely in the New Testament to denote the ministries of leaders and laity alike. Therefore, the special role of the deacon as implied in the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:8-10 is somewhat difficult to identify. This ministry is often traced to Acts 6:1-6, though the seven are never called deacons and at least two of them quickly assumed major roles in teaching and preaching. However, their task was “to wait (*diakoneō*, the verb form of *diakonos*) on tables,” a work of practical administration in dispensing the charitable gifts of the church. *Diakonos* was also used for Phoebe, known for her service to the church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Our modern application of the term to laypersons serving with pastors in local churches may not be far from the New Testament usage.

Applying biblical leadership roles to the modern era, we conclude that pastors carry out the functions of elders and overseers in the local congregations. Teaching and preaching of the Word lie at the heart of their ministry of building up the body of Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission.

In view of the wide ranging oversight of the early apostles and their associates, it also seems legitimate to extend the ministry functions of elders (*presbyteros*) and overseers (*epískopos*) to modern district and General Council levels. Yet we must acknowledge that in the providence of God there are many unanswered questions about the polity of the Early Church, and it is unwise to assume that any modern system of church government perfectly replicates it. If a single system were necessary, surely divine revelation would have been more extensive, and we would have little difficulty understanding the details of New Testament church government.

## **Conclusion**

New Testament ministry does not lend itself to a narrow, technical definition. Nor is it to be reserved just for an ordained clergy. As earlier stated, whenever the church acts in obedience to Christ it engages in ministry. And every member of the church is gifted by the Holy Spirit to be a minister in some special way.

At the same time, some among the ministering people of God are gifted by the Spirit to be ministers to ministers, as it were. They are first appointed by our Lord and gifted by His Spirit. Only then are they recognized and set apart, or ordained, by the church. These men and women are servant-leaders whose role is to nurture and equip the church for its mission of evangelism, worship, edification, and compassion.