

Models of Apostolic Ministry: A Practical Theology Approach

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What does apostolic ministry in the local church look like? Current discussion tends to focus on the title or designation of apostolic office, emphasizing the person who holds the office and suggesting that the office is the essential factor in determining Kingdom expansion. However, this emphasis subordinates the functional component of apostolic ministry found in Scripture and the practical evidence clearly exhibited in numerous churches across the nation. In a word, the function of apostolic ministry is “mission,” that is, cooperating with God as he works to redeem the world unto himself. This places evangelism and discipleship in the driver’s seat.

A secondary issue concerns methods of ministry or the ways people organize to fulfill the mission. Because ministry methods are contextually defined, each faith community will tend to determine leader and follower roles according to its cultural setting. This simply means that apostolic ministries will vary in their style of governance.

In summary, a practical theology of apostolic ministry incorporates vibrant evangelism that is expressed through well-equipped servants using culturally

sensitive methods. Across the United States, examples of this functional approach to apostolic ministry abound. The following pages present churches of various governing structures, none of which identifies a person in the office of apostle. They range in size from a few hundred persons to several thousands and represent the major geographic regions of the country.

The narratives come from phone interviews conducted with the senior leadership of these churches. While churches from a variety of denominations could serve as examples, the primary use of Assemblies of God churches has to do with the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary’s immediate connection to its denominational network.

**First Assembly of God, Ft. Myers,
Florida**

Dan Betzer, pastor

Website: www.thesilverdome.org

Mission is the lifeblood of the church. It forms the foundation for everything we do. —Dan Betzer

Several days a week, Dan Betzer broadcasts inspiring messages to the

greater Ft. Myers, Florida, area via radio and television. It is one of the many ministries First Assembly provides from its silver-domed nerve center.

To capitalize on the broadcasts' geographic reach, First Assembly has extended its physical presence into the region through a number of full-service ministry sites. Although each site has a host pastor, the leadership, membership and stewardship of these ministry sites are centralized under First Assembly. Betzer serves as the senior pastor for the entire constituency, preaching regularly at each ministry site. Through this method, the leadership of First Assembly has been intentional about ensuring that mission permeates every aspect of the church's ministry. While its media ministries extend into the whole region, First Assembly in Ft. Myers is reaching and discipling more people today through its satellite ministry approach.

Cedar Park Assembly of God, Bothell, Washington
Dr. Joe Fuiten, pastor
Website: www.cedarpark.org

We are here to minister to the needs of people from birth to the grave. — Joe Fuiten

Few people would think it unusual for Cedar Park Assembly of God to create a K-12 school to serve the community's education needs. However, many people might be surprised by the church's breadth of ministries that address life issues from dealing with infertility to choosing burial facilities.

With a strong commitment to the proclamation of the Word, community service and the leveraging of its resources, Cedar Park seeks to develop a

holistic approach to ministry. By incarnating Christ in the community, the church meets people at the natural and critical junctures of their lives. In the leveraging of its resources, Cedar Park takes a vision first approach. They structure the church's assets to acquire the property or resources for future ministry developments.

By being a birth-to-the-grave resource for faith-based services to its community, Cedar Park proclaims the gospel where its message is not normally heard.

James River Assembly of God, Ozark, Missouri
John Lindell, pastor
Website: www.jamesriver.org

James River is on a mission to reach the unchurched people of southwest Missouri. — John Lindell

Utilizing a model of ministry that focuses upward in worship, inward in commitment and outward in evangelism, James River Assembly of God reaches several thousand people each week. With a passion to extend its ministry boundaries in southwest Missouri, the church has committed itself to a strategic church-planting initiative that releases key resource persons, contributes substantial financial grants and provides parental guidance to the new church throughout the maturation process.

These congregations now minister to hundreds of people, demonstrating the success of these efforts. Though each church plant stands alone, all have elements of their mother's DNA: a strong commitment to weekly prayer, expository preaching, and evangelistic outreach.

By employing a biological model of church planting, James River Assembly of God fulfills its call to reach the unchurched people of southwest Missouri.

Sheffield Family Life Center, Kansas City, Missouri

Dr. George Westlake, Jr., pastor

Website:

www.sheffieldfamilylifecenter.org

We believe that everyone seeking to be active in a ministry role needs a vital biblical foundation.—George Westlake

A thriving urban megachurch, Sheffield Family Life Center exemplifies the characteristics so many multicultural churches pursue: inspirational worship, dynamic preaching, multicultural representation in leadership and the creative energy needed to tackle the tough issues urban populations face. Perhaps the thing that singles out Sheffield from many other churches of a similar demographic is the extent to which it allocates resources to equip people for ministry. Its church-based Bible institute functions at a college equivalent level, even offering the study of the biblical languages.

Pastor Westlake has a strong commitment to this Bible institute model, personally teaching several of the Bible and theology courses. The design not only equips people with the skills to be better teachers, preachers, counselors, and leaders, it enhances these skills within the context of the church's evangelistic outreach. Thorough preparation in the Word of God enables these leaders to be ready to give a biblical response to the issues they encounter in their urban community.

This biblical priority obviously works well, as Sheffield has trained several hundred people in its institute. Most are actively involved in fulfilling the church's mission to minister to the unreached populations in urban Kansas City and around the world.

Bethel Temple Assembly of God, Hampton, Virginia

Ron Johnson, pastor

Website: www.bethel-temple.org

If we are going to be a missional church, we must instill the church's vision and mission in every single person, beginning at the nursery school level.—Ron Johnson

When it comes to apostolic models of ministry, Bethel Temple Assembly typifies the traditional Pentecostal approach. A strong commitment to plant churches in a number of other states, as well as its own region, and around the world has resulted in the salvation of thousands of people.

Using the Ephesians 4:11,12 model of the fivefold ministries as their framework, Bethel Temple helps people understand their giftings, equips them for service and releases them into ministry. The church enacts this model through seven pillars on which every ministry of Bethel Temple rests: evangelism, worship, care, discipleship, life, expansion and prayer.

By investing leaders, members and funds, Bethel has demonstrated the principle of sowing and reaping: The more people and money the church gives away, the more people and money God returns. Consequently, the church has never experienced a drop in attendance or in giving.

River of Life Assembly of God, Cold Spring, Minnesota
Denny Curran, pastor
Website: www.riveroflifeag.org

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them (Acts 13:2, NASB).

Imagine the events that led the elders of the Antioch church to commission Barnabas and Saul for their frontier mission. This grassroots apostolic initiative resulted in a great harvest of souls and the planting of several churches that continued the mission. In a similar fashion, several pastors from the Central Section of the Minnesota District Council of the Assemblies of God met together in the early 1990s to consider how they could advance the mission of God to the unreached peoples of their area. Sensing the need for new churches to accomplish this task, they looked among their number and chose Denny Curran to plant a new church. Thus, River of Life Assembly of God in Cold Spring, Minnesota, was born.

While there may be a variety of reasons for this grassroots movement’s success, three vital components of this initiative rise above the others: (1) a sensitivity to and dependence upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, (2) a mutual accountability to resource the church plant and (3) a commitment to create reproducing churches. This Spirit-driven, mutually accountable, grassroots church planting movement offers a viable model for continuing the apostolic mission to reach the unchurched peoples of our nation.

Evangel Church Assembly of God, Sun City, Arizona

Melvin Holmquist, planting pastor
Website: www.evangelchurchag.com

Looking at the developing communities around us, we saw a field white unto harvest and asked the Lord, “What can we do?” —Melvin Holmquist

Beyond the retirement community of Sun City, Arizona, Evangel Church saw the changing demographics in the developing area around them. Because of a Spirit-inspired vision to extend its ministry, the church had a passionate desire to reach these communities with the gospel. Recognizing the generational make-up of Evangel’s congregation, Pastor Melvin Holmquist knew that reaching these communities would require a different model of ministry. Through a series of divine appointments, God brought to the congregation Lee McFarland, a young man whose unique skills equipped him to reach the people in these developing communities. Within a few months, Radiant Church was born in Surprise, Arizona.

Evangel’s wholehearted commitment to communicating the gospel to a younger generation compelled them to give birth to a new church. It did not matter to them that this new church would look distinctly different. Through their prayer and support, they ensured that Radiant Church would be equipped to meet the needs of a new generation.

New Life Church, Springfield, Missouri
Cal Swenson, pastor
Website: www.new-lifechurch.org

We are reaching a generation of people who have never been a part of any church fellowship. —Cal Swenson

After picking up their free bagels and coffee at the café, visitors to New Life Church take their seats in a candle-lit auditorium where an emcee greets them with a, “Welcome to New Life!” Here they listen to a contemporary worship band that is supported by a state-of-the-art lights, sound and projection systems.

Using this casual, seeker-oriented style, New Life seeks to connect people to God. Its success is evident in the people who come to Christ. In recent years, at least one person has committed his or her life to Jesus every Sunday.

For New Life Church, a contemporary style is the way to fulfill their mission. Though their methods may differ from those of other churches, one thing is clear—people are indeed connecting to God.

**National Community Church,
Washington, DC
Mark Batterson, pastor
Website: www.theaterchurch.com**

Our commitment to marketplace ministry directs our energies toward reaching our culture not changing it.—Mark Batterson

Deciding on a marketplace ministry approach, National Community Church chooses to take its worship services to the places people naturally congregate—theaters that are highly visible and easily accessible. Their only acquired property will house a coffee shop through which they can learn the language of the community and build relationships with people.

Due to its marketplace approach, National Community Church has found it necessary to operate with a relationally

oriented style of leadership and a fluid organizational structure that makes it possible to capitalize on ministry opportunities as they arise. With a proven method for evangelism, National Community Church is poised to extend its marketplace ministry into other locations in the Metro D.C. area. As it does, the results will be transformed lives, and with transformed lives comes a transformed culture.

**Canyon View Christian Fellowship,
San Diego, California
Mike Quinn, pastor
Website: www.cvcf.com**

We are a church of small groups, not a church with small groups.—Pastor Mike Quinn

With a firm commitment to reorient its ministry around the small groups model, the leadership of Canyon View Christian Fellowship began reallocating its monetary and personnel resources. The result has been a substantial influx of new people and new believers into the church body. About fifty percent of the church’s new believers come to faith directly or indirectly through the small groups ministry. It is the main front door into the church and the means by which the back door remains closed.

Small groups are more than a single program of ministry in the church. They are the primary engine that drives the evangelistic mission. With mission as the guiding principle, Teresa Quinn, small groups pastor, invests significant time in training the group leaders to be the first point of contact in the church’s relational evangelism and pastoral care. The church has grown numerically as it reaches new people with the gospel. It has remained healthy as the church’s

members take responsibility to meet the ministry needs of the community.

North Coast Church, Vista, California
Larry Osborne, pastor
Website: www.northcoastchurch.com

We sensed a need to expand our ministry to reach more people. We decided that video offered us a solution.—Larry Osborne

The previous church examples have one thing in common—all are affiliated with the Assemblies of God. The final example of a missional church deviates from this affiliation. North Coast Church in Vista, California, is on the leading edge of the church-planting movement. To reach the various demographical groups of its community, the church has multiple worship sites. Each service has live music for its worship and a facilitator who emcees the service and introduces videotaped sermon. While some may question whether the video component is too impersonal, the feedback of those who visit indicates it does not create a barrier to a meaningful worship experience. The evidence of its effectiveness is in the results. North Coast Church is experiencing exponential growth.

Several hundred churches now use this model of ministry across America. Churches committed to apostolic ministry understand that media technology provides an invaluable tool for fulfilling their mission.

Conclusion

The examples above illustrate the function, not the office, of apostolic ministry. Demonstrating the priority of evangelism and discipleship as the

defining elements of this function, they provide evidence that more than one governing structure or ministry method may be used to fulfill the mission. Clearly, churches can embody apostolic ministry in a variety of ways.

Therefore, the practical challenge before churches today is to find creative ways to incarnate the gospel in their communities. Functioning in apostolic ministry is not the responsibility of only a few individuals. Rather, each congregation has a divine calling to participate with God in his mission to redeem the world. This is our primary task.