

WHAT IS AN APOSTLE?

A Brief Statement by the International Coalition of Apostles

Introduction

The International Coalition of Apostles (ICA), founded in 1999, now counts over 500 members. Membership requires nomination by at least two active ICA members, presuming that peer-level apostles are the most qualified to recognize fellow apostles. This has been mostly a subjective process, given the fact that ICA has never issued an official statement outlining the basic qualifications expected in a bona fide apostle. Responding to several requests, both inside and outside of ICA, that such a statement be formulated, this paper is an attempt to respond.

Definition

An apostle is a Christian leader gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the extension of the kingdom of God.

Gifts and Ministries

Apostles, by definition, have been given the spiritual gift of apostle by the grace of God. This gift is listed among many others in 1 Corinthians 12. The same chapter, however, indicates that not all of those with the same gift have the same ministry, and not all those with the same ministry have the same activity (see 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

Among those with the gift of apostle, some have the ministry of vertical apostle. This means that they are in an apostolic leadership position over a network of churches and ministries or a network of those who minister in a certain affinity sphere, such as women or prayer or youth or worship, etc. Others are horizontal apostles who have a ministry of convening and connecting peers, such as other apostles or pastors or prophets, etc.

Some are territorial apostles to whom God has given authority covering a certain geographical area such as a neighborhood or a city or a state or a nation. Others have authority in a certain social arena such as government or finances or media, etc.

Many apostles minister primarily in the nuclear church, which takes the shape of congregations of believers that meet on Sundays or groupings of such congregations, while others minister primarily in the extended church which is the church in the workplace. These would be termed nuclear church apostles as opposed to extended church, or workplace, apostles.

Gifts and Offices

The gift of apostle, as in the case of all spiritual gifts, is given to believers by God as He pleases (See 1 Cor. 12:11,18). Spiritual gifts are given only by the grace of God.

However an office, such as the office of apostle, is not given by grace, it is earned by works. If God has given an individual the gift of apostle, the fruit of that gift will be evident to others and in due time the body of Christ will confer the office of apostle on that person. This act is most often termed “commissioning,” and it is performed by peer-level apostles representing the church and laying on hands. The title “apostle” is ordinarily used only by those who have been duly commissioned into the office.

Qualifications of Apostles

Certain qualifications apply to all apostles, regardless of the different ministries or activities that may have been assigned to them by God. They include:

- **Extraordinary character.** Apostles fulfill the leadership requirements outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. They take seriously the warning of James 3:1 that they will be judged with a stricter judgment than most other believers. They are holy.
- **Humility.** Jesus said that only those who humble themselves will be exalted. Since apostles are exalted by God (See 1 Cor. 12:28), they must be humble in order to qualify.
- **Leadership.** Not all leaders are apostles, but all apostles are leaders. Apostles must have followers to verify their leadership role.
- **Authority.** The characteristic that most distinguishes apostles from other members of the body of Christ is the authority that comes part and parcel with the gift of apostle.
- **Integrity.** Apostles are expected to display the integrity that will cause them to be “blameless” (1 Tim. 3:2) and “have a good testimony among those who are outside” (1 Tim. 3:7).

What All Apostles Do

- **They receive revelation.** Apostles hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Some of this revelation comes to them directly and some through proper relationships with prophets.
- **They cast vision.** Their vision is based on the revelation they receive.
- **They birth.** Apostles are self-starters who begin new things.
- **They govern.** Apostles are skilled in setting things in order.
- **They build.** Apostles strategize and find ways to carry a project along its intended course.

- **They finish.** Apostles are able to bring a project or a season of God to its desired conclusion.
- **They war.** Apostles are the generals in the army of God.
- **They align generations.** Apostles have a long-range perspective on the purposes of God and they raise up second-tier leadership for the future.
- **They equip.** Ephesians 4:12 says that apostles equip the saints for the work of the ministry.
- **They send.** Apostles send out those who are equipped to fulfill their role in extending the kingdom of God.

What Some Apostles Do

Given the differences in temperaments, in ministries, in callings, in activities, and in geographical locations, many but not all apostles will be characterized by:

- Having seen Jesus.
- Signs and wonders.
- Exposing heresy.
- Planting new churches.
- Imposing church discipline.
- Cross-cultural ministry.

Special Characteristics of Workplace Apostles

For the most part, workplace apostles will be expected to exhibit the same qualifications and move in the same activities as nuclear church apostles. However, because of their position in the workplace, some sources of their apostolic authority will be somewhat different.

- **Respect.** The starting point for nuclear church apostles is ordinarily relationships, whereas the starting point for workplace apostles is respect. By this we mean that the authority of nuclear church apostles is derived largely from their anointing and their relationships. On the other hand, the authority of workplace apostles is derived from the respect they command from others in the workplace. In the workplace, relationships ordinarily are earned through respect, not vice versa.
- **Money.** A major criterion for respect in the workplace is access to resources, particularly financial resources. Money commands respect, builds credibility, and confers authority more in the workplace than it might in the nuclear church. Workplace apostles who are financially independent have an advantage over those who are dependent on others for their income.
- **Renaissance person.** Another criterion for respect is being perceived as a “Renaissance person.” These are individuals who have command of a broad spectrum of interests.

- **Negotiating legal structures.** Workplace apostles intuitively move through and around legal entanglements. They do not allow legal structures to set boundaries around what God can do.
- **Position of influence.** Authority also comes from the influence one has in his or her determined sphere of the workplace. The seven molders of culture include family, religion, government, arts, media, business, and education. Each one has numerous subdivisions, and all have their specific rulebooks as to how influence is attained. Workplace apostles will know what their sphere or spheres are and they will have attained positions of influence within those spheres.
- **Kingdom mindset.** Not every financially successful leader in the workplace is, ipso facto, an apostle. Those who are will also have a kingdom mentality, plus the expected characteristics of any apostle.
- **Commissioning.** The process for recognizing and commissioning workplace apostles is still under development, and hopefully we will soon have a consensus in ICA as to how this should be done.

Submitted by
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