

## **The Role of Teaching and Teachers in the Boston Church of Christ**

### **Conclusions of Taskforce – May 2010**

“*Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*”  
(Psalm 119:33–34)

“My people will go into exile for lack of *understanding*.” (Isaiah 5:13)

“My people are destroyed from lack of *knowledge*.” (Hosea 4:6)

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the *knowledge of the truth* that leads to godliness.” (Titus 1:1)

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in *knowledge* and *depth of insight*, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.” (Philippians 1:9-10)

“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the *knowledge* of God. (Colossians 1:10)

“Make every effort to add to your faith...*knowledge*.” (2 Peter 1:5)

Christianity and Judaism are religions of the Word of God. Wherever and whenever the Word has been understood and obeyed, people have been able to fulfill the will of God. The Old and New Testaments are full of examples that demonstrate this truth: when people heard and were taught the Word of God, things went well for them; when they did not, it did not. In the early church, teaching was fundamental to the way that people became Christians and later grew and matured as Christians. Teaching, therefore, takes a front-row seat for disciples of Jesus as a necessity for our spiritual growth.

### **Defining Terms**

The various NT words for teaching are highly instructive: *matheteuo* (Mt 13.52, 28.19)—to “disciple”—means to train or to teach. We are disciples, we are learners, that is foundational to who we are. *Catecheo* (Luke 1.4, Acts 18.25, 1 Cor 14.19, Gal 6.6)—refers to more systematic instruction, and we need men and women who are gifted at instructing people in foundational truths about the Lord in a clear and comprehensive manner. *Noutheteo* (Rom 15.14, Acts 20.31, 1 Cor 4.14, Col 1.28, Col 3.16, 1 Thess 5.12, 5.14, 2 Thess 3.15)—means to admonish or exhort, to give instruction or to warn. *Paideuo* (Acts 7.22, 22.3, 2 Tim 1.20, 2 Tim 2.25, Titus 2.12, Heb 12.10, Rev 3.19)—which comes from the word for a “child,” means to instruct, train, discipline, correct, beat(!) or educate. The final, and by far most common, word for teaching is *didasko*—to teach or instruct. It is from this word that *didaskalos*, the common term for “teacher” in the NT, is derived.

Teaching can be done by anyone, and indeed *everyone*, based on the Great Commission and other passages (e.g., Hebrews 5:11–12; Acts 8:1, 4; Romans 15:14), is ultimately intended to teach. *Who* is doing the teaching is not the most crucial, but that teaching *happens* is indispensable. In another sense, however, not everyone is gifted to teach in the same capacity. We see very early on that certain men were described explicitly as “teachers” (*didaskaloi*, Acts 13:1). Consider the series of questions posed in 1 Corinthians 12:29: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?”<sup>1</sup> The expected answer is “No.” James warns the recipients of his letter that “Not many should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). So there is another sense in which teaching is a gift, and not all are teachers in this more limited use of the word.

### History of a Role

Prior to the exile, the Word of God was transmitted in Israel through priests and Levites, through prophets, and most widespread through the heads of families. During the exile and intertestamental period, classes of dedicated teachers developed in Judaism: the teachers of the law, the scribes, who were laymen devoted to instructing their countrymen in the law of God. They often looked to Ezra as a model, and their influence was widespread in the time of Jesus.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, he had much to say about the character of humility and service that are the distinguishing marks of true spiritual leadership (Matthew 18:1–4, 23:1–12, Mark 9: 33–35, 10:35–45, Luke 9:46–48, 22:24–26, John 13:13–17). He had little to say, however, about the ongoing leadership structures of the future communities of his disciples. He simply assured his apostles that they would be not be left as orphans, but would be guided by the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth (John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15). The biblical record indicates that leadership forms in the early decades of the church took shape gradually, with variations developing over time and from place to place. Members of the newly-formed Christian communities were influenced to a degree by their surroundings, and at times drew from familiar social organization and practices in their culture. But the impact of the teachings of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit kept them from copying these forms outright, as the historic and biblical evidence attests.

Early communities were marked by an emphasis on the charismatic gifts or endowments of the Holy Spirit that had been dispersed to all believers (1 Corinthians 12–14, Romans 12:3–8, 1 Peter 4:10–11)—including gifts of leadership. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, “In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the selection of local “elders” or “presbyters”

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<sup>1</sup> Literally: “All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they?”

<sup>2</sup> It may be that “those able to help others” and “those with gifts of administration” (literally “helps” and “governments”) are to be identified with “deacons” and “bishops.”

(*presbyteroi*—most likely carried over from the common practice in Jewish synagogues, which were governed by a council of elders) began very early on,<sup>3</sup> a role identical in biblical accounts with that of “overseers” or “bishops” (*episkopoi*, a term taken from the Hellenistic world that may have been more familiar to Gentile ears).<sup>4</sup>

Ministries in the early church could be grouped into two basic categories: ministries of the word and ministries of service, or tables (Acts 6:1–4, Romans 12:6–8, 1 Peter 4:11). The ministers of the word included the apostles, prophets and teachers, endowed with special gifts and commissions for teaching. In the early decades after Jesus’ ascension, the apostles and prophets proclaimed the Word of God concerning the revelation of the gospel, and how to live as disciples of Jesus and to mature as Christians. Evangelists, too, were ministers of the Word, focused on the first part of this task as they proclaimed the gospel. Teachers continued this task by instructing and grounding Christians in the Scriptures and the truths that had been revealed by the Holy Spirit or passed on by his apostles and followers. Over time as leaders were chosen for local churches, the ministries of the word and of service were embodied in the roles of bishop (elder) and deacon.<sup>5</sup>

It is intriguing to consider that Ephesians 4:11 may be describing a chronological progression: we have the apostles and prophets who laid the orthodox foundation for the church (Cf. Ephesians 2:20, 3:4–5); then evangelists who proclaimed the gospel, gaining new “beachheads” of faith and establishing Christian communities. The kind of men who would be qualified to bring that group to maturity are next described as pastor-teachers—those gifted to shepherd and nurture a church through teaching the Word of God.<sup>6</sup> A more commonly-held understanding of this verse among us could be called the “cord of three strands” view<sup>7</sup>—that the evangelist, pastor and teacher provide three leadership emphases that are all continuously needed and therefore present in the ongoing life of the church.

[Note: As a congregation grows, there will inevitably be more room and a greater need for specialization. It is not necessary, for instance, that the *gifts* of shepherding and teaching always be contained in one and the same person,<sup>8</sup> but that the *functions* of

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<sup>3</sup> In Acts 11:30 and 15:22, we see the presence of elders in Jerusalem, and in Acts 14:23, the Apostle Paul sees to the appointment of elders in the churches he had founded on his first missionary journey.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5,7 and 1 Peter 5:1. The earliest writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the *Didache* and the *First Epistle of Clement*, for example, show the church recognized two local church offices—elders (interchangeable term with bishop/overseer) and deacons.

<sup>5</sup> The diaconate is sometimes referred to as the “ministry of mercy,” or what we would call “benevolence.”

<sup>6</sup> This possibility is developed more fully in Andy Fleming’s 2003 paper titled “The New Testament Paradigm of Ministry and Ministry Roles.” In this view, the work of the evangelist gives way over time to the work of the pastor-teacher, and the goal of the whole process is to produce a level of maturity among the believers that has no further need of these leaders, but builds itself up in love as each part does its work. Not all are persuaded by this view of the verse, but a case can be made that makes good sense of the biblical data.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Douglas Jacoby’s 2001 paper titled “Church Polity.” This approach also has biblical support, but will produce a different paradigm for how ministry roles function today.

<sup>8</sup> “The definite article, which has been employed for each of the three categories mentioned so far, is repeated before ‘pastors’ but omitted before ‘teachers.’ What significance should be attached to this? Some

shepherding and teaching are taking place. In light of this, we see a role for the gifted teacher (as well as the pastor-teacher), to be active in teaching about God, the Word, the Christian way of life, and the knowledge of God's ways that is so crucial to the well-being and edification of the body.]

The triad of ministries of the word present in the apostolic age and belonging to the universal church (apostles, prophets and teachers) gave way over time to that of evangelists, pastors and teachers (or pastor-teachers). The mention of "evangelist" fades almost immediately from the writings of the early church fathers and that of "teacher" lingers for a time but is embodied more and more in the function of the elder. With the passing of the apostolic generation, it is the government of local congregations by a council of elders (leaders and ministers of the Word) and deacons (ministers of service/benevolence) that takes precedence and becomes the most normative structure in the churches.

This pattern of congregational leadership continued to evolve during the sub-apostolic period into a more hierarchical structure, with the term "bishop" eventually used exclusively to designate the chief or presiding leader, who was supported by a college of presbyters (= "priests"). As early as the second century, the writings of Ignatius bear witness to a much greater move toward a "monarchical" episcopacy in the churches of Asia Minor than what is indicated elsewhere. And by the third century, "every body of Christians, even if consisting of fewer than twelve families, is instructed to organize itself into a church under a ministry of office-bearers, consisting of a bishop or pastor, at least two elders and at least three deacons. If the bishop was illiterate (character weighed more

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have claimed that it indicates that the two groups are in fact identical (e.g. Barth, 438–39, who holds that one ministry only is being described, that of 'teaching shepherds'). In Acts 13:1 those designated 'teachers' in Antioch are shown exercising leadership while in the Pastorals teaching is a major role of the church leader (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). But it is doubtful whether this is enough to demonstrate that the two ministries were always exercised by the same people. It is more likely that they were overlapping functions, but that while almost all pastors were also teachers, not all teachers were also pastors. Whether the two functions were performed by a single individual within a particular local situation may well have depended on what gifted persons were present in that situation. The one definite article is therefore best taken as suggesting this close association of functions between two types of ministers who both operate within the local congregation." Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990).

Those in our group with some knowledge of Greek concur with Daniel Wallace that the insistence on grammatical grounds that Ephesians 4:11 must refer to a single class of gifted leaders referred to here as "pastor-teachers" rather than two separate classes ("pastors" and "teachers") is misguided. The oft-cited "Granville Sharp's Rule" (describing the phenomenon in which the same person is always designated whenever the definite article is not repeated before subsequent nouns or participles in a list of personal descriptions) can be applied absolutely only to personal, *singular*, non-proper nouns. The rule does not always apply in *plural* constructions, such as we are dealing with in Ephesians 4:11, and as attested in numerous other NT examples. Does this mean that our passage refers, therefore, to two distinct groups of people ("pastors" and "teachers")? Not necessarily, but it means that such a reading cannot be dismissed on grammatical grounds alone, as has often been asserted. Paul may be referring to a singular group. However, in keeping with the semantics of the plural noun construction in other NT texts, it is likely that "pastors" in this context are a subset of "teachers," which would further affirm that all pastors were to be teachers, but that not all teachers would be pastors. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 270–290, esp. 284.

than education in his selection), the congregation was told to elect a reader, and provision was made for a ministry of women.”<sup>9</sup>

The emergence of more standard forms of leadership was marked by a tension between “structure” and “Spirit” that would continue throughout the history of the church. Rigid tendencies toward structure have always brought about reaction. A classic early example of this was the rise of the Montanist movement in the second century. Montanus asserted the universal priesthood of Christians, even of females, against what he saw as a rising clerical aristocracy, which from the time of Ignatius had begun more and more to monopolize ministry privileges and functions. The Montanists considered the true qualification and appointment for the office of teacher to be found in direct endowment by the Spirit of God, as opposed to outward ordination and episcopal succession. They emphasized the free motion of the Spirit against the mechanism of a fixed ecclesiastical order.<sup>10</sup> Montanus went so far as to claim the continued presence of miraculous gifts, and considered two of his daughters to be prophetesses, receiving new and ongoing revelation from God. This eventually led not only to the branding of Montanists as heretics, but was a major impetus for developing the Christian “canon,” or agreed-upon list of authoritative Scriptures (the NT).

Other than as a descriptive term, it is interesting to note two of the ways in which a more formal role of “teacher” was retained in later Christianity. In the Catholic church, the “Catechist” (cf. Galatians 6:6) had the role of preparing soon-to-be-Christians (“catechumens”) for baptism by grounding them in the fundamentals of Christian belief and practice. In Protestantism, it was Calvin who made the case from Ephesians 4:11 for a “teacher” role that is distinct from that of the “pastor,” but his vision for this role (the “doctors” of the church, from the French word for the *didaskalos*, “docteur”) was primarily for the equipping of professional clergy or ministers. The model of seminaries for the instruction of ministers follows from this understanding.

The history of the teacher role—and of church leadership roles in general—highlights the ongoing need for us to wrestle with the proper balance of “structure” and “Spirit.” It is essential to remember that one of the key innovations of the new covenant lies in the

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<sup>9</sup> ISBE, s.v. “Ministry.” The article continues: “It was possible to obey such instructions, because the ministry of the early church received no stipends. The ministry were office-bearers, to whom ecclesiastical obedience was due in virtue of their call and election and their being set apart by prayer, and perhaps by laying on of hands, for sacred office; but they were at the same time merchants, artisans, or engaged in other secular callings, and supported themselves. Buildings, set apart for public worship, did not exist until the very close of the 2nd century, and then only in a few populous centers in towns which had felt persecution but slightly. The only property which a church possessed, besides its copies of the Scriptures, its congregational records and perhaps a place of burial, were the offerings which were presented by members of the congregation, mostly in kind, after the Eucharist; and these offerings were distributed to the poor of the congregation. If office-bearers received a share, it was only on account of their poverty and because they were on the roll of widows, orphans and helpless poor.”

<sup>10</sup> “Here was the point where they necessarily assumed a schismatic character, and arrayed against themselves the episcopal hierarchy. But they only brought another kind of aristocracy into the place of the condemned distinction of clergy and laity. They claimed for their prophets what they denied to the Catholic bishops. They put a great gulf between the true spiritual Christians and the merely psychical; and this induced spiritual pride and false pietism.” ISBE, s.v. “Montanism.”

“democratization” of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the limited bestowal of the Spirit in OT times upon chosen leaders—prophets, priests, judges or kings—the distinctive mark of the new covenant people is the presence of the Holy Spirit in each and every believer, and the distribution of the gifts needed for the edification of this “body” among all the various “members.” We must guard against limiting the Spirit’s influence through the imposition of overly-rigid structures; but we can at the same time acknowledge that various roles of human leadership emerge in the pages of the NT that are ordained by God (e.g., Ephesians 4:11: “It was [Jesus] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers”; 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.”). We must be careful that our structures do not “quench” the work of the Holy Spirit present in every disciple (1 Thessalonians 5:19); but we can at the same time affirm the orderly nature of true spirituality and welcome practical considerations that keep our focus on building up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:12, 33: “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. ...For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”).

### Teaching and Preaching

A brief word here about the difference between teaching and preaching. Often times, we can overstate the difference between the two, such as when we refer simply to the content of a Sunday morning sermon as “preaching” and the content of a class as “teaching.” Or when we consider exhortation, passion and emotional appeal to fall under the purview of “preaching,” while intellectual depth, systematic exposition and even dry or esoteric theories describe for us what “teaching” is all about. Much of this delineation in modern lingo comes from our cultural associations and usage. When distinguishing between preaching and teaching in this manner, we are more often than not simply commenting upon stylistic differences in the approaches of different speakers. We need to refine our thinking on this score. Either “preaching” or “teaching” can be deep or shallow, either one can be passionate or dry, either can engage more or less skillfully in the exposition of a text. All depends on the gifts, skill and approach of the “preacher” or “teacher.” It is neither the venue, nor the passion, nor the expository abilities of the speaker that differentiate between teaching and preaching—although all of these play a major role in how *good* that teaching or preaching is! If we move from our cultural understanding to the use of these terms in Scripture, the difference seems to have more to do with the *content* of the message and the *audience* that is being addressed; although again, a hard and fast distinction cannot always be maintained. The NT terms for preaching (*euangelizomai*, *kerusso*) have to do with “proclamation,” specifically the proclamation of the good news, the gospel about Jesus Christ, and so are most often directed to non-Christian audiences; while terms for teaching (see terms used above), which are occasionally used of instructing non-Christians, are most often used to describe instruction and training of Christians. In this understanding, the primary purview of preaching would be the first half of the Great Commission (the focus of evangelists in the

NT), and the purview of teaching is primarily the second half of the Great Commission (the focus of pastors and teachers). The teaching *style* is not the focus of these terms. A preacher can and does instruct and a teacher can and does exhort. If we wish to be more biblical in our usage, our modern associations with these terms must be adjusted. It will always be the case that different approaches will appeal to different people. More precise words should be chosen if we wish to distinguish a preference for passion, exhortation, practicality, expository skill or some other quality in our speakers. Style is dictated by the goal of the teaching/preaching and the competencies of the teacher/preacher. Whether one wears the title of evangelist, elder, teacher, preacher or Bible Talk leader, every effort should be made to “speak as one speaking the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11). Effective communicators like Jesus or Paul had all of the above!

### Qualifications

So who can be a teacher? Teaching is influence. While there is no single list of qualifications in the Bible for one who would hold an “office” of teacher, the qualifications for anyone who would teach the congregation are important because of the influence they will have. The general qualities required for any leadership capacity in the church should be considered, together with the special qualities that Scripture and common sense tell us that teaching demands. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The teacher should be a *spiritual* man. He should bear evidence of a life that is “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). He should have integrity, exhibiting the moral and character qualities that are primary for one who would teach others the word of God. The Word is a sword that cuts both ways. There are numerous warnings against hypocrisy throughout the NT. Speaking about the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus told his disciples to do what they say, not to do what they do (Matthew 23:3). We are to be different, we are to live and exemplify what we teach. Humility is an essential trait, and it is important to notice that every catalogue of spiritual gifts in Paul’s writings is couched in an appeal for humility (Rom 12:3, 1 Cor 1–4, Eph 4:12), unity (Rom 12:4–5, 1 Cor 12:12–13, Eph 4:3–6) and grace (Rom 12:1–3, 1 Cor 12:4–11, Eph 4:7–10).

The teacher needs to be an *educated* man in the word of God. Whether that comes through years of diligent personal study; or training and mentoring by wiser, more experienced, teachers; or through more formal training in a Seminary or Bible School setting; it must be coupled with the experience of life and ministry. These lend more weight to the teaching because of the insight and perspective that can only come from navigating the challenges of life as a faithful Christian. Ministry experience should be valued, years in the Lord should be valued, formal education should be valued. We must acknowledge that there are added challenges facing a teacher in the twenty-first century. We don’t speak the language and we don’t live in the culture of the first-century world in which the NT was written, or in the earlier cultures of the OT. For this reason, we should not malign or discourage more formal training which can facilitate understanding of the

languages, cultures and contexts in which the Bible was written. On the other hand, there need not be an insistence on extensive academic training in every case. There is no one way to get there, but those who consistently teach others must show themselves to be instructed and competent in handling the text of the Bible.

A teacher must also be competent with people, a good *communicator*. Teaching is not just knowledge, but the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively. In many languages, the verb “to teach” is simply the causal form of the word that means “to learn” or “to know;” in other words, to teach is to “cause to learn,” to “cause to know.” A person can learn or know something without necessarily being able to cause others to learn it. A teacher is someone who can take even difficult concepts and communicate them in a clear and compelling manner.

A teacher is not an innovator. He is first and foremost a *steward*. He takes seriously the command to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught” (2 Thessalonians 2:15, NASB). Creativity is valuable, not for coming up with novel doctrines and new insights with every lesson, but for communicating the age-old truths of the Scriptures in ways that are fresh, convincing and meaningful in the twenty-first century. In John Stott’s words, we live between two worlds: the world of the Bible and the world of our hearers. The task of the preacher or teacher is to be a bridge-builder between those two worlds.

A teacher needs to be *practical*, in the sense that his hearers can make meaningful application about what God wants for their lives. This doesn’t mean that every lesson will end with a list of “ten things to do.” Teaching in our church culture has at times been overly prescriptive, going into much detail about “what we need to do with what we’ve heard.” Our focus must be getting God’s word into people’s *hearts* so that they can wrestle out *for themselves* what they are to do in the everyday situations of life. “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:33–34, Hebrews 10:16–17).

A teacher must be a *passionate* man for the word of God. “If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching let us give all we have to our teaching; and if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it” (Rom 12:6–8, Phillips). When people heard Jesus teach, they were “amazed at his teaching.” He taught as one with authority. A true teacher isn’t a weak-willed transmitter of information, but someone who brings the word to life in a meaningful and memorable way.

A teacher will be *united* with other servant-leaders in the common goal of maturing and building up the body of Christ. The teacher brings a complementary—not adversarial—contribution to this process. A teacher will seek to teach according to the needs of the community, and guard against unbalanced teaching (“riding his favorite hobby horses”)

and unhealthy teaching (that which is not “in accord with sound doctrine,” Titus 2:1) that can undermine unity. And while the teacher must not shrink from being a prophetic voice for repentance and change as needed, he must also recognize his need for the perspectives of other brothers and sisters in assessing the needs of the group and the appropriateness of his message.

The teacher should be a man who is worthy of respect and whose ability to teach has been *tested and approved*. As Paul taught the Roman church with regard to evaluating their gifts, “Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all” (Rom 12:3, Phillips). As with all spiritual gifts, it is the *body* that confirms the gift. The congregation will ultimately confirm whether we have a teacher on our hands—through their commendation and through the impact in their lives. In John 17:3, Jesus says that the foundation of eternal life is that we “know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” This is the ultimate test of teachers, teaching and learners of God’s Word!

These qualifications can be summarized under the rubrics of character, competence and chemistry. All of these are needed to have the kind of teacher that is “approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).

A final word on qualifications: a gift for leadership and administration is not always present in one who is gifted to teach. A bishop (elder) must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), but a teacher may or may not be able to manage and lead. Recognition as a teacher should not be based primarily on the ability to set up and administer teaching programs throughout the church, but the ability to teach others the word of God.

### Recognition and Appointment

The elders and evangelists in the congregation acknowledge the contributions of men and women who have already been serving in this capacity, especially in those regions of the church where the development of teaching ministries is more advanced. They desire to more formally recognize those individuals who meet the requisite qualifications of character, competence and chemistry in order to ensure (1) a shared understanding of the teacher role across the church, (2) an awareness of those who are commended by the congregation for this ministry, and (3) the support of the congregation and its leaders for teachers to fulfill such a role effectively.

A number of concerns were raised with regard to a formal appointment process by those who currently function in a teaching capacity. We feel it is important to include these considerations here. Speaking about the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, Jesus declared:

But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.

The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:5–12)

What is the meaning of this prohibition? In many subsequent NT passages that speak of “teachers,” the term is not a title but simply a descriptor of their activity. Clearly, however, passages like Acts 13:1, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11 indicate that Christians used the term “teacher” to refer to themselves and others in the exercise of a teaching gift or the performance of a teaching ministry. In the context of Matthew 23, Jesus warns against the wrongful exaltation of human leaders, the infatuation with titular privilege rather than service, and the exclusive claim of God the Father and Jesus Christ as those to whom our allegiance is owed. It would be wrong to say “I am of Rabbi Hillel” or “I am of Teacher Shammai,” just as it was wrong of the Corinthians to say “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos.” We have one Teacher—the Christ. All gifts of leadership derive from Jesus himself and must bring glory to him and the Father alone. Jesus alone is the Apostle whom we confess (Heb 3:1), and his chosen apostles were to represent him just as he represented the Father. He alone is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), and our shepherds are to imitate his concern for the sheep. He is the Proclaimer of Good News (Mark 1:14-15), and our evangelists follow his example when carrying on this ministry. Christ is ultimately the one Teacher, therefore Christian teachers do not exalt themselves or draw men to themselves, but faithfully teach others to obey everything He has commanded.

Another concern raised was the tendency of formal appointment to exclude or limit the exercise and development of this gift in others. Development of formal positions can indeed lead to an unhealthy monopoly of various ministry activities, and must be countered with recognition that the Holy Spirit is at work in and through every member of the body. This is especially pertinent when we understand that all Christians are to be teachers in a more general sense. One remarkable aspect of our heritage has been the raising up of Bible Talk leaders, house church leaders, preachers, elders and a multitude of disciples who could use the Bible to teach others how to become Christians. Our desire should be to foster opportunities for more and more people to become proficient at teaching the Bible, and to do this we must be vigilant in ensuring that our ministers and teachers are fulfilling their roles as servants of the body, nurturing and equipping the gifts of our Spirit-filled members rather than unduly reserving functions of ministry to themselves. Recognition must not lead to exclusion.

Finally, the primary concern of our teachers is that we are providing good, solid, biblical teaching—not that we have a tidy leadership structure. We recommend identifying and developing those with a gift and capacity for teaching in every ministry group in the church. Where there are not recognized teachers, then whoever are the most effective and experienced, whether they wear the title of evangelist, or elder, or something else—those men need to provide and facilitate the kind of educational programs and instruction that will build up the body until God provides additional teachers for this task. Whatever ministry model is adopted must serve and not hinder this aim.

A particular passage in Paul's treatment of gifts in 1 Corinthians proved helpful for clarifying some aspects of the recognition and appointment process:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.  
And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.  
There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.  
But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.  
(1 Corinthians 12:4–7, NASB)

In context, the purpose of this verse is to emphasize unity amid the diversity of the Spirit's work in the body of Christ. In this strikingly "trinitarian" passage, we are reminded that unity is grounded in the very nature of God himself—with "Spirit," "Lord" and "God" embodying the perfect example of "oneness" in "manyness." For our purposes here, however, we found the different terms used by Paul to describe the Spirit's activity to be instructive: "gifts," "ministries" and "effects." An assortment of gifts (Greek: *charisma*) have been given to the body, many of which are discussed by Paul in the succeeding verses. When a gift is put to use, it will find expression in a variety of "effects" or "workings" (Greek: *energema*), or in fulfillment of a particular "service" or "ministry" (Greek: *diakonia*). For instance, a person with the gift of "helps" (12:28) may use that gift when fixing his neighbor's sink, which constitutes a valid and outward "effect" or operation of that gift. When called upon to organize the congregation's efforts to care for the poor, however, this same gift is now directed in a "ministry."

We do not wish to press these terms too far, but find these distinctions useful for several reasons. First, we should remember that a gift cannot be *appointed*; it can only be *recognized* and *developed*. Our recognition of teachers does not confer that gift or ability on anyone, nor does it mean that such a gift is absent in another, but only acknowledges that we have witnessed evidence of the gift of teaching at work in the person's life. Second, a gifted person may, on the other hand, be appointed to fulfill a specific *ministry*. For instance, a ministry of teaching in his or her regional congregation, or a ministry devoted to the instruction of new Christians or the biblical training of ministers. The fact that a gifted person is not selected for a designated ministry could occur for a number of reasons, and is not an indication that he does not possess the gift. These may include lack of experience or spiritual maturity, availability to serve, or the needs of the particular congregation or ministry at that time. Not everyone who might otherwise be qualified to be an evangelist, for instance, is appointed to that task. To take an extreme example, there were many false teachers in the early church; some of these may have indeed possessed a "gift" of teaching, but they were not qualified for a role in that ministry because of their unhealthy emphases or divisive tendencies. Finally, a gifted teacher who is not appointed to a particular ministry can and should utilize his or her gift to good "effect" in the family, in the small group, or as called upon in the congregation. If a man's gift is teaching, he should teach! (Romans 12:7). We feel these reflections are helpful for communicating the intent of recognizing or appointing teachers for particular ministry roles while safeguarding against an elitist or exclusive view of what that appointment entails.

Keeping these important considerations in mind, we believe the elders have the right and responsibility to direct the leadership model used by the church to ensure the gifted roles

of leadership combine to build up the body to full maturity in Christ. The absence of any exact Biblical formula that defines this process leaves us to assume that good judgment accompanied by resolute prayer must be used to define a working concept that is functionally effective, biblically consistent and relationally united to all church-building roles. The elders would set an expectation that a clear path to congregational and regional recognition be followed by all.

With recognition that the spirit-filled body of believers confirms gifts of leadership and service, we would propose a process whereby members of regional fellowships put forward a list of men in whom they have witnessed the teaching gift already at work, with a call to give prayerful consideration to the kinds of qualities discussed above. A similar process has been repeated in numerous settings in this and other congregations with surprising consensus among the members as to who these gifted individuals are. Where qualified men are found, the elders, with prayer and due regard for the appraisal of local leadership groups, would approve such men for recognition as teachers with regional or congregational duties and influence. Recognized teachers themselves will have a much stronger role in the recommendation and approval of future candidates for the teaching ministry, with final approval for recognition left to the elders.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> How were men selected to ministry roles in functioning NT churches? The choosing of men in the Jerusalem church to resolve the complaint that Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food is instructive: “‘Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:3–6). The process began by entrusting the affected group in the church with the selection of qualified men. The slate of choices was then turned over to the leadership of the apostles for their prayer and approval for this ministry.

Similarly, on the return leg of their first missionary journey recorded in Acts, Paul and Barnabas revisited their church plantings to strengthen and encourage the disciples: “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23). How did this “appointment” take place? And does this passage set a precedent of “the appointment of elders by evangelists”? First of all, it must be remembered that Paul was functioning in his authoritative role as an apostle here and in the pastoral letters of 1 Timothy and Titus. It must not always be assumed that the prerogatives of apostleship also described the duties and functions of “evangelists” in every case. But this concern becomes secondary if we realize that the word for “appoint” had much more democratic overtones than we often assume. The verb *chairoteneo* comes from the root word *chair* (“hand”) and meant in practice “to choose or select by the raising of the hand; to appoint to office by the raising of hands; to select or vote for.” A similar process seems to be in view as that of Acts 6, namely, that Paul and Barnabas facilitated and approved the selection of elders by the Christians of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch themselves.

Titus was commanded by Paul to “straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). The Greek word here is stronger, *kathistemi*, meaning “to appoint or put in charge.” Once again, however, should we suppose that Titus and Timothy are to be considered as archetypal “evangelists” in these settings? Or were they simply an extension, as envoys, of the apostolic authority of Paul himself? Moreover, since the method of selecting these elders is not mentioned, it would be safe to assume that they employed the same process used by Paul himself in Acts 14 to engage the members of the churches in Crete and Ephesus in the choice of their qualified men.

There is no evidence that the gift of teaching is gender specific, although the role would have a more restricted venue for female teachers—their audience would not include men. Paul instructed Titus to have older women of spiritual character instruct younger women about how to live as followers of Jesus (Titus 2:3–5). The elders could, at their discretion, recognize women teachers as they deem necessary, following a similar process of selection by women in the congregation, and with greater consideration of the opinions of respected women and women’s leaders of regional groups.

We recommend that a fresh evaluation and recognition of regional teachers and a congregational teacher group using these criteria be put in place by September 15th. This would be in keeping with the process of reappointing and appointing Congregational elders in 2004.

### Function

How will this function? As with any ministry endeavor, there will be a “learning curve” as we discover new and better ways for our teaching ministries to operate and best serve the goals of maturing the body. Based on a model that has already proven healthy and effective where implemented, we envision the development of regional teacher groups that can, in close communication with elders and evangelists, establish and oversee teaching responsibilities in the regions. Excellence in teaching would be the goal, with the aim of contributing what is needed from a teaching perspective to bring about spiritual maturity in our congregation. Such groups would facilitate regular preview and review of lessons, discipling on attitude and delivery, opportunities for learning, and the raising up of more qualified teachers.

A commitment to identifiable means of Biblical training in accurately handling the Word from a hermeneutical / exegetical / contextual perspective would be expected of those who are recognized or would seek recognition for teaching. Examples of this include in-depth personal study, pursuit of higher academic degrees, mentoring by other gifted teachers, or a combination of these.

The scope of a teacher’s activity would be determined by his or her unique capacities, gifts and availability. The elders, in consultation with other teachers and respected leaders, would determine which men or women from our regional groups would best fulfill teaching responsibilities at a congregational level, and those best suited to represent our congregation in teaching concerns for the whole brotherhood. In addition, some teachers may develop expertise in specific aspects of Christian life or doctrine that would merit their inclusion in certain settings or occasions but not in others. Some may be especially gifted at grounding new Christians in the fundamentals of the faith, others adept at in-depth Bible exposition, still others at providing good written materials, teaching about Christian marriage, defending the faith through apologetics, or any number of other focuses. At any point, it may be determined that the church desires to support certain individuals for a dedicated ministry of teaching for the good of the church. Teachers do not need to be paid by the church, just as evangelists or elders do not need to be paid by

the church. Financial support says nothing about the vital nature of the role. A congregation can choose to pay teachers if it wants, just as it may pay an evangelist, a computer manager or an administrative assistant at the office.<sup>12</sup> Finally, it should be understood that while the gift of teaching is not bestowed or rescinded by men, it is the responsibility of elders to guard the flock against false or unhealthy teaching and divisive or destructive teachers. Inclusion in the ranks of recognized teachers may be suspended or withdrawn for anyone whose activities or conduct is deemed unsuitable for this influential task.

The concern of teaching has to be present in the life of the church, and therefore in the *leadership* of the church. For that to happen, there needs to be a strong “voice” for teaching in the leadership and the planning activities of the congregation. The recommendation is that there be recognized teachers who are able to contribute in a meaningful way to the direction of the church. The perspective of those who “think” like teachers should be valued and the teaching “voice” taken into consideration in leadership circles at every level of the congregation. It is our conviction that the teaching function is as vital as the shepherding or evangelistic functions to the health and the well-being of the church.

A commitment to providing venues for teaching is essential. Whether on Sundays, mid-week services or some other occasion, regular teaching opportunities must be provided. Special opportunities such as Bible Jubilees, Saturday classes, staff training and other initiatives will also be helpful on a reasonable basis. Bottom line, there must be a recognition that the church truly needs what teachers have to offer. It is not simply an issue of periodically finding a time and place for teachers to exercise their favorite passion, but having a deep conviction that the body needs all the various gifts that God has provided in order to become healthy and mature.

A teacher or combination of teachers may be tasked from time to time with the preparation of special lessons or workshops, curriculum development, staff training, discussion of difficult matters, or other needs.

### Relationship

Relationally, gifted teachers should be—just as with any leadership function—able to work in concert with others. Appointed or not, they must take responsibility to forge working relationships with other leaders, and other leaders must take responsibility to forge a relationship with the teacher.

Evangelists, elders and teachers all share the common tool of teaching, although they may exercise it in different arenas or for different purposes. And while teaching is a vital and essential function used by all leaders, it is uniquely distinguished as the more singular gift of some. Teachers tend to be different than elders or evangelists in the way

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<sup>12</sup> Consider Galatians 6:6, 1 Timothy 5:17–18, Philippians 4:15–18, 1 Corinthians 9:3–18.

they think. The differences must be understood and accepted by all three alike. Inability to accept these differences can be a great source of tension.

In the midst of a discussion of different gifts in Corinth, Paul breaks off with a crucial reminder about the nature of love. One ingredient of love is that “it always trusts” (1 Corinthians 13:7). If we are to cultivate a teaching role that is on a par with other congregational functions, trust for one another is essential. Teachers need to trust and be trusted by other leaders. We all share the vision of a vibrant, mature church that glorifies God. Remembering this, it will be our loving, trusting, honest relationships that drive the success or failure of teaching in our church-building efforts.

When introducing another key text on gifts of leadership, Paul writes:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1–3)

Exercising gifts of leadership requires a disposition that promotes unity by exhibiting humility, gentleness, patience and love. For this to happen, we must all be committed to input, correction and personal growth. A spiritual leader will pursue unity with those in his group or other leadership groups.

A humble leader will demonstrate growth in the ability to persuade or be persuadable as appropriate in matters of doctrine, opinion and judgment. James tells us that “the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17–18). The word translated “submissive” here is *eupieithes*, which means “open to reason, easily persuaded.” There are times when we must be willing to submit to the majority opinion of our peer group if unable to persuade others to our conviction. We must be willing to submit to the elders in matters of judgment about conflict with others in keeping with our conscience. The demeanor required of a godly teacher is described in 2 Timothy 2:24–25: “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, correcting those who are in opposition with gentleness” (2 Timothy 2:24–25, NASB). In a large family or church each leader must become proficient in these qualities and competencies to promote effective functioning, peace and unity for all.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Among the spiritual qualities demanded of elders in 1 Timothy 3, in addition to being *didaktikos* (“able to teach”), are the requirements of *nephalios* (“sober, restrained; one who holds himself in; one who always has a halter on himself”); *sophron* (“sensible, moderate”); *epieikes* (“gentle, forbearing, not quarrelsome”); *amachos* (“peaceful, peaceable, not contentious”). In Titus 1, we find that in addition to being able to “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it,” the bishop must not be *authades* (“arrogant, stubborn, self-willed”) or *orgilos* (“angry, quick-tempered, given to anger”) but *egkrates* (“self-controlled”). These are godly qualities that should be the goal of all servant-leaders.

## A Helpful Case Study: Apollos

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

If there is a model for the role of teacher in the New Testament, the example of Apollos stands out. His background as a Jew in the intellectual climate of Alexandria was advantageous. He had devoted himself to learning, and his knowledge of the Scriptures was extensive. When it came to the message of Jesus, he spoke both accurately and fervently. This was an exciting Christian teacher!

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

In spite of his impressive resume, Apollos was humble and approachable. He was willing to accept that he lacked a complete or proper understanding, and welcomed the opportunity to learn from others. His humble demeanor and learner's spirit are great examples for us today.

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:24-28)

Apollos was of great help to the brothers because his contribution was valued and he was allowed to use his gifts to strengthen the believers. Respected leaders encouraged and supported his teaching ministry. They went so far as to recommend him to others and to facilitate opportunities for him to teach. The elders and evangelists can likewise work in conjunction with the teachers to provide venues for them to exercise their gifts. This would involve creating opportunities for teaching such as morning classes, Bible jubilees or midweek series aimed at strengthening the church.

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-13)

The Corinthian church had benefitted from the work of Paul, Apollos and Peter (Cephas). In their immaturity, they had allowed worldly standards of evaluation to pit the contributions of these men against one another, provoking a sharp rebuke from Paul.

People in our day will also prefer different styles of teaching or leading—but all are needed for the strengthening of the body. When considering their descriptions elsewhere in Scripture, it is possible to consider Paul, Apollos and Peter to be typical of the “evangelist, teacher and elder” in their emphases and approaches. People in our churches

will sometimes express a preference for one of these against the others. However, just as in Corinth, the contributions of all of these functions are vital and important.

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:3-9)

Ministers of every stripe or flavor are simply servants. Whether planting the seed (preaching, evangelism) or watering it (instructing, nurturing), gifted leaders share the same purpose of building up the “field” or “building” of God—that is, his people. They are fellow workers in this great enterprise. We must keep God’s vision for his church in the forefront, and our roles as simply fellow servants in this process.

Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. (1 Corinthians 4:6)

We must not take pride in our respective gifts or roles. Worldly assessments and competitiveness “go beyond what is written” in the pages of the Bible, which teach us that God has distributed gifts in his church according to his will, and is at work in all of them to strengthen and mature his church, to his glory alone.