



WHAT IS AN APOSTLE?

International Coalition of Apostles Colorado Springs, Colorado

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 statement has been processed with ICA members over a two year period and it is now issued as an official consensus statement. Certain ICA members may hold varying opinions regarding some of the details, but there is agreement on the general thrust and essence of this statement.

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).

Many apostles minister primarily in the nuclear church, which takes the shape of congregations of believers that meet in church buildings or in homes or groupings of such congregations, while others minister primarily in the workplace. The first would be termed “nuclear church” apostles as over against “extended church”, or workplace, apostles.

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.

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.

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 alone, but given as a result of works that have demonstrated faithfulness in stewarding the gift. If God has chosen to give a man or a woman the gift of apostle, the fruit of that gift will be evident to others and in due time the body of Christ will recognize the activation of the gift and confer the office of apostle on that person. This act is most often termed “commissioning,” and it is performed by peer-level apostles, as well as prophets, representing the church and laying on hands. The title “apostle” is ordinarily used only by those who have been duly commissioned into the office, although this principle has not yet been formalized in many situations.

Apostolic Spheres

There is no such thing as an apostle to the whole church. God assigns to each apostle certain spheres in which they exercise authority. Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 10:13-16. There he says, “We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us” (2 Cor. 10:13). Apostolic spheres can be ecclesiastical, functional, territorial (geographic), cultural, or workplace.

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 (1 Peter 1:15).
- **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 extraordinary authority that comes part and parcel with the gift of apostle. They gain their authority through fatherhood, not through arrogance or imposition.
- **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).
- **Wisdom.** True apostleship does not come without maturity, and maturity cultivates wisdom. Apostles have the God-given ability to see the big picture and to help others find their place in God’s plan.
- **Prayer.** While not all apostles would be intercessors per se, all have close contact with God through a disciplined and effective prayer life (Acts 6:4).

What All Apostles Do

- **They receive revelation.** Apostles hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Some of this revelation comes directly to them, some of it is received together with prophets, and other times through proper relationships with prophets.
- **They cast vision.** Their vision is based on the revelation they receive, grounded in the Scriptures.
- **They birth.** Apostles are self-starters who begin new things.
- **They father.** Apostles desire to see their sons and daughters in the faith rise higher in effective ministry than themselves.
- **They impart life.** God uses apostles to activate His blessings in others (Rom. 1:11).
- **They build.** Apostles strategize and find ways to carry a project along its intended course, including the funding that is required.
- **They govern.** Apostles are skilled in setting things in order. Along with prophets, they lay the biblical foundation of the kingdom and the church (Eph. 2:20).

- **They teach.** Early believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).
- **They send.** Apostles send out those who are equipped to fulfill their role in extending the kingdom of God
- **They finish.** Apostles are able to bring a project or a season of God to its desired conclusion. They are uneasy until the project is done. They seldom burn out.
- **They war.** Apostles are the generals in the army of God. They lead the way in tearing down the strongholds of the enemy.
- **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 form apostolic teams.** Apostles are not lone rangers, they are team players. They surround themselves with strong, committed leaders.
- **They resolve conflicts.** Apostles are on call to settle disputes among individuals and in churches and ministries.
- **They discipline.** Apostles deal with malfeasance and correct it through biblical methods of reprimand and punishment,

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.**
- **Performing signs and wonders.**
- **Exposing heresy.**
- **Planting new churches.**
- **Ministering cross-culturally.**
- **Taking back territory from the enemy, converting it to the kingdom.**

Special Characteristics of Workplace Apostles

For the most part, workplace or extended church 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, certain 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, authenticated by their successful track record. 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. Money, however, is never the focus; it is regarded only as a necessary tool. Workplace apostles who are financially independent have an advantage over those who are dependent on others for their income.
- **Risk taker.** The road leading to apostolic authority in the workplace is a mine field. Along with the successes, workplace apostles have become accustomed to taking the hits. Most have lost much money and they have learned from it. However, by God’s grace, they fear no one, and they do not turn back because they know that God is not concerned about money.
- **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 restricting what God can do. This ability is based on inter-workings of relationships built on trust.
- **Position of influence.** Authority also comes from the unusual 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. The explicit overriding motivation for their use of influence is to glorify God.
- **Kingdom mindset.** Not every financially successful Christian leader in the workplace is, ipso facto, an apostle. Those who are will also have a kingdom mentality, meaning that their driving passion is to see God's kingdom values permeate society on every level. They exhibit the expected characteristics of any apostle. They are actively involved in city or nation transformation as well as setting in order the "church" located in the workplace.
- **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.

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