

31. MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Intercontinental Church of God provides an ordained ministry in accordance with the example and procedures of the early Church as outlined in the New Testament. Ministers are elders in the faith, ordained by God to give spiritual guidance and leadership to the local congregations and to act as servants of God in spreading the gospel to the world.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Throughout history God has worked through human individuals as agents and chosen servants. In the Old Testament it was the "preachers of righteousness," the patriarchs, the priests and Levites, the prophets and at times righteous kings such as David. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself called out and ordained twelve disciples as the first ministers of the New Testament. He entrusted them with the responsibility of governing the Church, serving the spiritual needs of its members, and preaching the gospel to the world and other duties as explained in Mark 3:14-15 and elsewhere.

While a minister should be willing to serve his congregation in any way necessary, his responsibilities are primarily to minister to the spiritual needs of his people. A minister's primary responsibility is to nurture the positive fruits of God's Holy Spirit as expressed individually and collectively in his congregation. By so doing, he helps build a committed, dedicated group which responds with fervor to the biblical commission of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:18-20) and which eagerly looks forward to the Kingdom of God. The minister develops these characteristics in many ways: through preaching and teaching, giving his encouragement when a member is experiencing personal trials, by offering advice and counsel in the areas of his professional competence, and by serving the congregation in performance of necessary religious ceremonies such as marriages and funerals.

The Church recognizes that a minister's personal *example* is one of his strongest and most effective methods of cultivating the growth of true Christianity in the local church. A man who is selfless, dedicated to, convicted by, and living within, the true values of God as expressed in the Bible will be greatly admired by the congregation and hence enormously effective. The shining light of his own spiritual life will be his greatest tool for constructing God's spiritual temple which is the Church. Such a minister will deal in a positive, helpful, encouraging, loving manner with his congregation; he will not police their life or dictate their faith, but will be instead a helper of their joy. "Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24).

A minister is thus not an "intercessor" *between* a Christian and God, but as a New Testament minister of the "spirit" (2 Cor. 3:6) one who helps build the Christian's own personal relationship with his Creator. Even so, occasionally, when circumstances demand, the minister must fulfill his responsibility as a true shepherd by administering spiritual discipline for the protection of his flock (cf. 1 Cor. 5).

A minister of God has responsibilities to those within the community outside his congregation. He must be an example of the Christian way of life by striving to serve the nonbeliever as well as the believer. To this end a minister should involve himself, as much as he practically can, in the local community to serve both the spiritually and physically needy. His service may range from the collecting of food and other necessities during a local disaster or other emergency, to the giving of encouragement and bestowing of compassion upon the great masses of lonely and forgotten widows, orphans, and indigent and ill persons. Thus an effective minister will be sensitive to the needs of all humanity, but he will always save his greatest efforts and energies for his own congregation over which he has been given spiritual charge. Indeed, the two are related as the minister

should actively look for ways to expand the effective "light" of his local congregation as a beacon of true Christian values within the community.

The ministry is a calling. This means that God Himself chooses who should enter His ministry, rather than man himself solely making that decision (John. 15:16). God indicates whom He desires to become His spiritual servant by causing the person's life to express the fruits associated with the ministry. Likewise, the qualifications of the ministry as outlined in 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1, and elsewhere are considered. A prospective minister must be hospitable, able to teach, patient, not covetous, reputable, experienced in the faith, etc. When a man is ready for the ministry, he is ordained through the laying on of hands in accordance with the example set in Acts 13.

The actual organization of the ministry in the Church of God follows generally the principles as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. It was not Paul's intent in these passages to create a permanent hierarchical structure for all generations of the church. He is too vague in his description and delineation's for that to have been his purpose. What we do learn from these scriptures is how the early church government functioned.

Another office of ordination is that of deacons and deaconesses. Qualifications for these offices are outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The basic responsibility of the deacon and deaconess is to serve the physical needs of the congregations so the ministers may attend to more pressing spiritual needs. Acts 6 is an example of ordination of certain men to this office and shows that those ordained to this position should be people of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

Service is the keynote of the ministry. Those who hold this office reflect the words Christ spoke to His disciples, "You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority among them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister (servant); and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (slave): even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto [not to be served], but to minister (but to serve), and to give His life for ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

The Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association
P.O. Box 747
Flint, TX 75762
Phone: (903) 561-7070 • Fax: (903) 561-4141

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