

# Our Purpose

The apostles understood God's purpose for the Church. This is why the churches they established in the first century were glorious expressions of Christ's body on the earth. Today there is much disagreement over how local assemblies are to be structured. But we believe the Bible spells out in clear and unambiguous terms the structure of the local assemblies established by the apostles. We also believe that God is now calling His people to recognize the apostolic pattern and begin transitioning the local assemblies into it. For this to happen, however, believers will have to understand exactly what the biblical pattern is and how to transition from where they are today to that pattern.

Our purpose in establishing this website is to provide those who sincerely want to build according to the biblical pattern with a centralized location for obtaining material on the themes discussed in our book *The Glorious Church*. We also want to provide a forum where people can ask questions, raise issues, and engage in healthy discussion on these themes. Our hope is that God's people will begin to study the biblical pattern and pray about taking steps, as God makes the way, toward transitioning into a more biblical church structure. We understand that this will require humility, honesty, and great courage.

# Our Vision

As localized expressions of the body of Christ, every assembly is responsible for submitting to Jesus as its Head and allowing Him to direct the life of the body. He is the builder of His Church. But Jesus only builds according to His plan. This is why His laborers must take heed *how* they build, for "unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalms 127:1). This gives rise to the question of *church polity*; that is, what is the structure of oversight and ministry within a local apostolic assembly? Is there a specific form of church structure God has established and requires His people to follow? Or do His people have latitude in how a local assembly is structured? While the New Testament does not present church polity in a progression of explicit instructions, it does reveal a specific structure through a variety of *patterns* and *examples*.

We believe that every assembly should be continually examining its polity and making whatever adjustments are necessary to align itself with the polity revealed in the New Testament. This polity can be summarized by the following principles:

1. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd of every local assembly and all the members are His sheep. Within each assembly, and among all assemblies, He is to be acknowledged as the Head and given preeminence in all things.
2. Jesus Christ expresses Himself in the earth through localized assemblies of His

people. Each local assembly is a witness to their community of the love and power of Jesus, providing deliverance, redemption, healing, restoration, spiritual growth, and equipping for ministry. Under the Headship of the Lord Jesus, each local assembly has autonomous governing authority and is not subject to any outside organizational authority. Local assemblies are connected to one another through mutual love, honor, and service.

3. Jesus Christ plants local assemblies through teams of believers led by apostles and prophets. The founding apostolic team is responsible overseeing each assembly until such time as qualified men can be appointed as shepherding overseers. Once these appointments have been made, the apostolic team may continue to have influence in the assembly, but no longer has direct oversight responsibilities.
4. Jesus Christ provides shepherding and oversight for each mature local assembly through an appointed team of colleagues variously called overseers, elders, or pastor-teachers. These men have equal decision-making authority but differ in spiritual gifts, capabilities, skills, responsibilities, level of financial support, and influence within the assembly.
5. Jesus Christ equips the people of each local assembly for their works of ministry through apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Some of these gifts may be resident within the local assembly and some may come from outside, ministering temporarily on a periodic basis.
6. Jesus Christ provides intimate shepherding to the people of each local assembly through small groups of believers meeting in private homes under trained and accountable leadership.
7. Jesus Christ provides practical service to the people of each local assembly through a team of biblically qualified and appointed deacons.
8. Jesus Christ reaches out to the unsaved through His people. Each local assembly is responsible for evangelizing their community and supporting the work of evangelizing other communities wherever there is no established assembly.

When a local assembly is built according to the polity exemplified by Paul and the other apostles, the following statements become true and operative:

**Jesus Christ is the pastor/shepherd of the local assembly.**

**He provides oversight through the elders.**

**He equips the believers through apostles, prophets, evangelists,**

**pastors, and teachers.**

**He provides personal shepherding through the home groups.**

**He provides practical service through the deacons.**

This is apostolic church polity. There will be variations in the way these principles are implemented on a local level, but the principles remain true irrespective of the circumstances. By submitting to this polity, an assembly positions itself to submit fully to the Headship of Jesus Christ and labor with Him in the building of His Church.

The foundation of everything we have said about oversight in a local assembly is humble servant leadership. Christian leaders are not to operate like leaders in the world around us, who lord it over and exercise authority over (Mark 10:42). Jesus specifically instructed, Yet it shall not be so among you (V.43). This means that it is possible for an assembly to be structured in perfect accord with biblical polity, yet fail because the leaders are operating from a power and control perspective rather than a servant perspective. A group of men can run a tyranny just as easily as an individual. So in the end, the real issue is not solely one of polity but of heart. Elder/overseers must be men of character, men of humility, and men of sacrificial love.

The following statements provide an overview of what we currently see as God's plan for the end-time Church and the structural forms that facilitate that plan.

1. God desires to manifest Himself mightily throughout the earth (in what we sometimes call revival or a mighty move of God ). But for God to do this, the Church must provide Him with a properly constructed dwelling place. (As types of the Church, both the ark of Noah and the tabernacle of Moses had to be built in exact accord with the divine pattern.)
2. God dwells in the Church in two ways: 1) in individual believers and 2) in local assemblies. Both must be constructed according to the patterns expressed in the Word of God. We believe that most of what God has accomplished to date has been because of the correctness of various individual believers. The lack of proper structure in the local assemblies has actually restrained Him. Imagine what will happen once we begin properly structuring entire assemblies.
3. Most local assemblies are not structured according to the biblical pattern, but have unwittingly followed patterns which have been brought out of denominational Christianity and worldly organizational systems. Today, the majority of local churches are under the controlling authority of either a single leader (usually called the pastor) or a church board. Many are also under the authority of a hierarchical denominational organization. None of these situations are biblical.

4. The biblical polity for the local assembly includes a foundation of servant leadership, a properly functioning team of biblically qualified deacons, regular meetings of small groups of believers in private homes, and pastoral oversight by a team of biblically qualified elder-overseers.
5. We believe that God is calling for local assemblies to begin a transitioning process away from the traditional models and into the New Testament model. This process should proceed along the following general course: 1) establish the principles of servant-leadership and 100% involvement in ministry; 2) begin functioning through small groups (teams) to solve problems and accomplish missions of the assembly; 3) establish biblically qualified deacons; 4) establish biblically functioning home groups; 5) establish biblically qualified elder-overseers, at which point the assembly will no longer be under the pastoral care of a single individual; 6) establish an ongoing process to equip the saints for the work of ministry until they all begin functioning in unity as the body of Christ in submission to the Head, Jesus Christ.

Due to many variables, the precise way in which an established assembly transitions from its present polity to the polity described on this website is a difficult issue. To attempt it without first establishing a firm foundation of humble servant leadership would be a serious mistake. And since a well-functioning home group ministry provides a place for future leaders to experience group dynamics and prepare for future service as deacons and elders, home groups are a must. An assembly must also establish a deliberate process for developing those with potential oversight gifts and qualifying them according to the biblical criteria. Such a transition will take time and require much patience and guidance of the Holy Spirit; but if we want Jesus to build His church, we must build according to His pattern.

Anyone interested in learning more about the principles of church structure addressed on this website are encouraged to post a question and participate in our discussion board. The authors may be contacted by phone at (717) 249-2059; by mail at PO Box 337, Carlisle, PA 17013; or by email (see front page of this website).

*May the love and peace of Jesus be multiplied to all who read this.*

**David Huston and Jim McKinley**