

Saints Need Apostles

13 October 2023



FEATURED ARTICLE

Saints Need Apostles

By Michael d'Offay
& Nadene Badenhorst

Belonging to a church that is in apostolic partnership is not an “optional extra” or a “nice to have”, but is essential to the health of the local church and, therefore, our own health and growth as believers. But why is this so? How do “ordinary saints” who are not elders or in full-time ministry benefit from [the apostolic](#)? Let’s look at four reasons.

1. Apostles equip the saints for works of ministry

“So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV).

In some churches, the pastor does all the ministry with the rest of the people looking on while he prays, prophesies, lays hands on the sick, casts out demons, etc. This was not God’s intention for the church. His intention was always for the church to be a priesthood of believers, where every member of the body ministers to God and each other. The Bible is clear that every believer has been given a spiritual gift, and that each one of us must play our part and use our gift(s) to strengthen and build up the body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). (As a side note, this is why our apostolic partnership is called “Four12”, as it references Ephesians 4:12, which is about equipping saints for the work of ministry).

These men have the ability to see what is “missing” in the church and what needs to be done to bring it into greater health.

Ephesians 4 tells us that God gives certain men and women as trans-local gifts to the church (referred to as “the Ephesians 4 gifts” or “the five-fold”), specifically to train the saints in using their spiritual gifts and to build up the church to function effectively as the body of Christ on the earth – doing what Jesus did and showing the world what He is like.

These (five-fold) gifts include apostles, who carry a unique, God-given grace on their lives to help the elders in the local church to build God’s church according to the biblical blueprint or design. These men have the ability to see what is “missing” in the church and what needs to be done to bring it into greater health. Apostles also help to make sure that everything the church teaches and does is properly rooted on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

2. Apostles help the church into unity and maturity

Ephesians 4:11-13 also tells us that the (five-fold) gifts, including apostles, are necessary to help bring the church into unity of the faith, unity in the knowledge of Jesus, and maturity to the fullness of Christ.

Our maturing as believers and growing together in genuine love and unity is something that will continue for as long as Jesus is still away from His Bride. Only when He returns will there be perfect unity forever and will we ourselves be perfect as He is perfect. What the aforesaid Scripture says is that in the meanwhile, and for as long as we are still waiting for Jesus’ return, we need apostles and other gifts to teach and train us how to grow in and maintain oneness of heart, mind and purpose (unity). One of the ways in which apostles help to bring the church into unity is by setting and uniting believers around the vision of what Jesus has called us to as the church. Also, where there is disunity and division, they bring perspective, correction and discipline, if needed, and help to restore unity and order in the church.

...without these gifts coming and working into our congregations, we will never come into the kind of unity and maturity that Jesus intended

What the Scripture further tells us, is that apostles (and other trans-local gifts) are needed to help us become more Christ-like and grow up in the faith. Again, they do this by teaching, training and leading by example, always going back to the foundation of who Jesus is and pointing believers to Him as the author and perfecter of our faith.

The implication of Ephesians 4:11-13 is clear: without these gifts coming and working into our congregations, we will never come into the kind of unity and maturity that Jesus intended, becoming more like Him in every way.

3. Apostles safeguard the church

Apostles who operate in team with the church’s elders are, in a sense, given as protection for the local church, and specifically for the believers who make up that church and submit themselves to the leadership of the local elders. This is firstly because of the apostles’ role to make sure that everything the local church teaches and does is properly rooted on the foundation of the Lord Jesus and that no other foundation is laid or built upon (Ephesians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 3:10-11).

In addition to this, apostles help safeguard sound doctrine. In other words, they make sure that the church's beliefs and values are Christ-centered and biblical, and that the elders do not teach/preach things that are false. Where there is doctrinal error or drift, the apostles and their teams step in to bring correction and re-alignment with Scripture. This is an important safeguard against false or unbalanced doctrines, which can easily find their way into the church and ultimately do great damage to believers' faith.

Because the apostles have relationships with the elders, they can continue to...make sure that they remain faithful shepherds of God's flock.

From the pattern of the New Testament, we see it is the responsibility of apostles, and those to whom they delegate, to appoint elders in the local church. This is another protection for members in that they have the assurance that the men appointed as elders, to whom they as members are to submit (Hebrews 13:17), are indeed godly men whose character qualifies them for the responsibility of leading God's people. Because the apostles have relationships with the elders, they can continue to father/mentor them in this role, bring wise perspective to them on difficult matters, and ultimately make sure that they remain faithful shepherds of God's flock. Where an elder abuses their authority, apostles are able to intervene and hold the elder(s) to account, which is another safeguard for the members entrusted to the elders' care. Likewise, where an elder is in sin, the apostles will draw alongside the affected eldership team to give perspective and assist in the exercising of discipline in a biblical manner that honours God. (The same that applies to a saint in unrepentant sin. In complex cases, it would be wise for the eldership to get apostolic input into the discipline process).

All of these are "[apostolic safeguards](#)" to make sure that the local church is built in a healthy way; to protect believers against doctrinal error and drift; and to help the church be a beautiful expression of Jesus' body on the earth. The implication for a church that is not in apostolic partnership and does not have these safeguards in place is that its leaders and members are exponentially more vulnerable to error and drift, and potentially without recourse where things go really wrong.

4. We partner together to disciple the nations

Apostles typically see "the bigger picture" of what God is doing. Because they work trans-locally, they have a sense of what God is doing not just in the local context, but what He is doing in and through the body of Christ on a much broader platform.

While apostolic gifts come into the local church and help them to build God's church God's way, they understand that God's plan was never for the local church to function in isolation. Instead, the New Testament model is for the local church to partner with other local churches and for the churches to work together to make disciples of nations. As such, apostles create an opportunity for the local church to be part of something bigger and to reach not only their neighbourhoods, but the nations for Christ.

...an apostolic partnership means a linking in heart, mind and purpose with other churches around the world.

The Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20) is for everyone who calls themselves a believer – not just for apostles, elders or leaders in the church. As such, it is not just the Ephesians 4 gifts or the leaders of the church who get to go – it is the privilege of every believer to partner with what God is doing across the globe, to minister into other churches for their strengthening and encouragement, and to be part of extending His Kingdom across the earth.

Ultimately, being part of a church that is joined to other churches in an [apostolic partnership](#) means a linking in heart, mind and purpose with other churches around the world. Through this link, the relationships forged across partnering churches, and sharing what (gifts, resources, etc) we have with one another, strength and unity come. And where there is unity, God commands a blessing (Psalm 133).

Conclusion

In closing, we can see why it is so important to be part of a church that is in [a healthy apostolic partnership](#). Apostolic partnership benefits not only the elders and the leaders of the church, but benefits and protects every saint who makes up the local church. Without this partnership, the church will never come into the fullness of what Christ intended her to be and neither will individual saints. Apostolic partnership, on the other hand, understands that not one (church, or individual) carries the fullness of Christ; and that it is only in our joining together, with each (church, and individual) needing and belonging to the other, that we can truly reflect what God is like.