

WELCOME TO WORD OF GRACE

Word of Grace Network is a fellowship of leaders who want to be part of the great end-time harvest. In order to accomplish this, we must build stronger relationships, so we can work together.

Consider this: If each of us were given a short piece of string and were told to go out and catch fish, how much would we be able to accomplish by ourselves? Yet, if we took the time to tie each piece of string together, we can form a great net and catch many fish. We need to share our gifts, our time, and our resources, in order to more effectively advance the Kingdom of God together as a network. Within these pages, you can learn more about the vision and values that our network aspires to.

OUR HISTORY

Here is the story of how Word of Grace Network got started:

The local church that gave the initial leadership to establishing Word of Grace was Rhema Fellowship, in Lowville, New York, which I had helped pioneer in 1985. Rhema was a Charismatic Mennonite Church that wanted to share what they were experiencing about the Holy Spirit with other Mennonites and hungry people from every other denominational background. After many years of working in the Mennonite context, it became evident that we should leave the denomination. We began seeking the Lord about who to affiliate with and asked other groups who were also leaving the Mennonite church what they were doing. We contacted Hopewell Fellowship in Pennsylvania, they told them that they were forming their own network and encouraged us to do the same. They we could join them in becoming a part of a network for network leaders that was just being formed. This was ARCnet, which is an Association of Radical Church Networks. It became clear to our leadership that this was a fulfillment of what the Lord had spoken to us about back in 1991, when He said we would establish a safe place for pastors to come together for fellowship. I had had a vision for starting a network for about ten years but was waiting for the right time to launch it.

Back in the late 1980's, the Lord had given me a vision for this kind of relationship-based fellowship of church leaders, which was not common in those days. This vision was confirmed in a vivid way through prophetic presbytery held at Rhema in 1991, but we waited for the Lord to establish in His way in His time. In the meantime, Penn began to relate informally to a number of other pastors who were more apostolic in their thinking, which was reflected in their desire to do missions together. We began going overseas together, sharing in each other's pulpits, and retreating together for a number of years. The other thing we had in common was that we had all been part of denominations or other groups that did not provide what we were

looking for in our affiliation. We all wanted to be part of a like-minded group where we could be together and build together, for the benefit of the next generation of leaders. These men would eventually make up the founding members of Word of Grace Network.

In the meantime, Penn had been asked to help form a fellowship for pastors in Orissa, India for the tribal pastors he was working with. This became Word of Grace – India. (formed in 1996) The same kind of thing was happening in the Ukraine, with more of an emphasis on relief work. Whatever we learned during this experience was applied to starting the network in back here in New York State.

Word of Grace Network was formally launched in 2001, with seven founding members who were all pastoring churches around the State of New York.

Currently, there are about forty men and their wives who relate to us formally and informally but is part of what we are doing. While most of the men are from New York State, others relate to us from up and down the eastern sea-board and into Canada.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

Today, God is raising up many apostolic-minded churches to network together, so they can help bring in the end-time harvest. In order to do this effectively, we have to begin thinking differently than we did in the past. Most of us came out of various denominational backgrounds but the system needed so much time, energy, and finances to maintain, yet it produced so little. My personal experience could be described as walking beside a large combine as it crawled across the field, with all the steam and noise, belts, pulleys, and tracks moving, yet out the back end came a big puff of smoke and a little bale of hay. I did not want to spend any more time being part of something that worked so hard to accomplished so little. During this same time-frame, a number of brothers who were working with me in missions. We found that we could accomplish so much more, because were all like-minded. That is when I began to make a distinction between apostolic thinking and denominational thinking.

APOSTOLIC THINKING

Apostles tend to bring people together for a common work, strengthen local churches, plant new works, raise up leaders, and do mission work at home and overseas. In many cases, an apostle will also pastor a local church. The life and liberty of that church will attract other like-minded ministries and churches, so they can join together to reach their area. Apostolic movements have five basic things in common:

1. They gather churches and people around specific purposes, not just around specific doctrinal distinctives.

2. They realize that the form and function of most present-day denominations is not sufficient alone to get the harvest in.
3. They encourage leadership to function with a higher level of authority than what would be allowed in most denominations, who tend to reserve most of their authority to a board function.
4. They tend to have a higher expectation of what a local church can do to impact the world.
5. Apostolic-minded churches are usually connected with other churches out of mutual respect and have common goals.

DENOMINATIONAL THINKING

Denominations are usually made up of those who hold the same doctrine, the same system of government or the same historical roots. Networks can be made up of people who come from many different backgrounds, but are like-minded, which comes out of sharing the same values and vision.

Denominations usually place people into fellowship together because they share the same geographic location, whereas Networks tend to link people together because of relationships, in spite of the geography involved.

Denominations tend to control things from a central government, whereas Networks want to give as much local autonomy to churches as possible.

Denominations tend to require exclusive relationship of their ministers, whereas Networks will work with anyone who is interested in building the Kingdom of God.

Denominations tend to invite people into positions of influence based on rank, tenure, or political influence, whereas Networks tend to focus more on a person's calling, gifts, and the health of their relationships with others.

Today, I believe we were looking for a new approach to working together to get the great harvest in, which we believe will be so great, that God will use everything available to get it in, including denominations.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE JOIN YOUR NETWORK?

There are a number of reasons people are joining networks these days. It is a major trend in the Body of Christ, world-wide. Here are some that we think are important to consider:

1. They Like Our Purpose: Someone may want to join Word of Grace Network because they have a desire to work with others, have a vision to plant new churches, want to help develop new young leaders, and do outreach together, both here and overseas. The Kingdom of God advances best through cooperative effort and much can be accomplished when like-minded people with the same vision and different gifts work together.

2. They Want Relationships: Another reason someone may want to join Word of Grace is because they have a strong desire for real relationships, which not only strengthens our own spiritual lives, but also benefits their local church. The healthier we are, the healthier our churches can be. The central focus of our network, the thing that will hold us together, will be the relationships we intentionally cultivate. If this is not your goal, then there is not much point in joining.

3. They want a structure that releases ministry, rather than restricts it: We all have experienced both the blessings and limitations of structure. While some structure is needed, we do not want to put all our time and resources into maintaining a system of government that is too top-heavy or cumbersome. Our goal is to keep the structure as light and flexible as possible.

4. They Want to Build Something for the Next Generation: One reason to join our network is to help build something for the next generation that we didn't have ourselves. Most of us grew up in denominations that were not especially supportive or healthy. Some of the structures were not safe to be in. The next generation can learn from our experience. What if we worked together to build the kind of network that our young men and women would flourish in? Join us if you want to help do this through our godly example of how we build relationships, maintain healthy accountability, and find balanced teaching. We can also help them by giving them training seminars, reflective retreats, and powerful outreach opportunities, which allow them to build stronger ministries.

WHERE DOES YOUR NAME COME FROM?

The name "Word of Grace" comes from a verse found in Acts 20:32 where the apostle Paul turned the churches he had established over to the elders, entrusting them God and to the *"word of His grace"*.

This is our heart and tends to be the desire of those who affiliate with us.

WHAT ARE YOUR BASIC BELIEFS?

Our Lives Are Built on the Holy Scriptures

We believe the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God upon which we should govern every aspect of our lives. We believe the Godhead to be the Trinity, which consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His atoning death, in His bodily resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. We also believe in Christ's personal return, which brings an end to this age, upon which He will judge the living and the dead. We believe that salvation, healing, and deliverance are available to everyone through the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary. We only baptize those who trust Jesus Christ for their personal salvation and who confess Him before others.

God's Order for the Local Church

All Christians need to be committed and submitted to a local expression of the Body, which is known as the local church. We believe in Elder/Pastor rule, giving the pastor the first and final authority to lead the flock.

The Weapons of our Warfare are not Carnal

We understand that Jesus taught and demonstrated non-resistance because He knew this would effectively stop the devil. Ours is a spiritual conflict, which needs to be fought by spiritual means.

The Spirit-Filled Life

We believe in the Baptism with the Holy Spirit as a distinct and separate experience from the New Birth. We believe the gifts of the Spirit and His miraculous power are as available today as they were at the beginning of the Church. We also believe that each ministry gift, such as prophets and apostles, are necessary to build strong, life-giving, churches today.

Marriage

We believe that marriage is a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, as God intended it from the beginning. Marriage by God's design was to be a life of commitment and should be the priority as long as both the husband and wife shall live.

Sexual Sins

Fornication—which includes adultery, incest, and homosexuality—is defined in Scripture as sin. We are told that, if we practice sexual sin and remain unrepentant, it will result in our ineligibility to be part of the Kingdom of God. For this reason, those who are practice these sins would also be ineligible to be part of our fellowship.

Human Life Begins at Conception

We believe that life begins at conception and that we should provide the same love and protection before the birth of a child as we would give after.

OUR GLOBAL GOALS

Word of Grace has been active in a number of countries overseas including India, the Ukraine, Haiti, and Chile, Columbia, Spain, Portugal, and throughout Central America. Everyone in our network is involved with overseas missions in some way, either by doing relief work, training leaders, or planting churches, or providing support for those who do this.

It is also our desire to help indigenous leaders build autonomous networks of their own. We tend to relate to those who do not fit into any particular denominational mold, but who want to be part of something larger than themselves.

We want to show them that is important to be connected and accountable to others, so we can build safe, healthy churches for our people.

They need to know that it is possible to have real authority without dominating another's faith. To do this, we intentionally limit our own authority, so they can see by our example how we serve the Lord. We desire no other authority beyond what this affords us.

We desire that each native network work with other kingdom-minded ministries who are doing the same kind of work in their area. We want to find ways to bless and support them because "Freely we have received, freely we give."

It is our desire to come alongside those who are already helping the poor, planting churches, providing leadership training, and doing evangelism, rather than going into an area and doing this ourselves.

We desire to support our native partners through counsel, training, and other resources, which will help them fulfill their mission.

We are looking to partner with those who want what is in our hearts, rather than what is in our wallets. It is our goal to avoid creating any unhealthy financial dependencies but to show how to trust the Lord to meet our needs.

We tend to draw those who hold a conservative view of the scripture, have a real reliance on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and whose priority is to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Word of Grace Network is to build a relationship-based fellowship of like-minded pastors and ministers, so we can work together in missions, both here and around the world.

We have defined our values and vision, established a course of action, and set a standard of accountability so that, together, we can build strong, healthy churches.

In order to fulfill this purpose, we will focus on the following areas:

- We want to provide a place where church leaders can establish meaningful relationships with those who are like-minded.
- We want to provide general oversight that enhances local church autonomy and inspires accountability among our pastors.
- We want to provide events where church leaders can come together for mutual edification.
- We want to provide resources for ministers and those preparing for ministry, that will enhance their personal life and help develop their ministry.
- We want to work together to do outreach and church planting in the State of New York, which will help enlarge the Kingdom of God.

We trust that as we work together to fulfill these goals, our affiliate churches will have a growing sense of identity and purpose. They will have a connection with something that is local, as well as have an active part in what God is doing around the world.

OUR RESOURCES

The following resources are available for anyone who is hungry for real fellowship, good spiritual food, and to part of the great end-time harvest.

ANNUAL CONFERENCES. We have a couple conferences a year, so our members can come together to develop and deepen their relationships. These meetings have worship and teaching that is refreshing and relevant for pastors and church leaders. We will also have our annual business meeting during our spring Leadership Conference.

RETREATS. There will be retreats in various geographical areas for the purpose of seeking the Lord, gaining vision, deepening our relationships.

TEACHING MATERIAL. Teaching material is available in book form, on our website, and social media like YouTube, which our members can access.

PASTORAL ASSISTANCE. Our leadership team will be available to provide consultation and assistance for all our pastors and their churches.

MISSION TRIPS. There are always various trips in the works, which we want those who are part of our network to take part in.

OUR VALUES AND VISION

Today, God is raising up many apostles and apostolic-minded churches to network together in order to bring in the end-time harvest. Apostles tend to bring people together around a common purpose, which often involves strengthening local churches, planting new works, raising up new leaders, and doing mission work here and overseas.

In many cases, an apostle will pastor a local church and the life and liberty of that church will attract other churches and ministries who want to reach their area. Apostolic-minded churches are usually connected with other churches who share the same values and vision. However, these networks are not new denominations. Their form and function are different.

Apostolic networks have four basic things in common:

1. They gather churches and people around specific purposes, not specific doctrinal distinctives or historical backgrounds.
2. They realize that the form and function of most present-day denominations are not sufficient alone to get the harvest in.
3. They encourage leadership to function with a higher level of authority than what would be allowed in most denominations.
4. They have a higher expectation of what a local church can do to impact the world.

To learn more about apostolic churches and movements, we recommend that you read *“The New Apostolic Churches”* and *“Church Quake”* by C. Peter Wagner. Another book along the same line is: *“Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement”* by David Cannistraci.

HOW IS THE NETWORK FINANCED?

Just like a local church, we expect those who relate to us to show their commitment by their attendance, participation, relationship to leadership, and financial support, so we would like those who are committed to Word of Grace to show it the same way.

Each Network has its own way of gathering financial support for the group. Some require that the senior pastor direct their personal tithe to support the network. We do not want to tell our members how much they should give, as it would change the nature of our relationship. Instead, we would like each pastor or minister to find a way to give consistently to the ongoing support of the network.

This support goes to pay our staff salaries, office expenses, and helps with our event costs.

Our Leadership Team decides how the finances will be dispersed. An accounting of each year's spending, as well as any proposed spending, will be presented in our annual report.

HOW DOES YOUR LEADERSHIP FUNCTION?

The leadership team of Word of Grace Network act as elders, the same as in a local church. Their responsibilities are:

1. to establish the vision for and giving direction to the Word of Grace with the input from our members.
2. to ensure that this network functions in a way that honors the Lord and the vision He gave us.
3. to maintain doctrinal purity by issuing of position statements as the need arises.
4. to help up and release like-minded leaders to assist in reaching our goals.
5. to help set the direction and themes for the gatherings, retreats, and seminars.
6. to be available to assist our pastors and affiliate churches, as the need arises.
7. to oversee the finances, including collection, budgeting, accounting, and distribution of finances given in trust by our members. They shall provide an annual report to the network.

HOW TO YOU HANDLE CREDENTIALING?

We believe that the pastors and missionaries of our network should be ordained or credentialed by the local church. This is not only more practical, but it insures true autonomy of the local church and the best way to insure accountability. If someone fails to maintain their ministry, the local church can remover their credentials.

Word of Grace can provide temporary credentials for pastors who are in transition from one church to another or for those churches who have not developed to the point where they can do this for themselves.

WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY MEAN TO YOU?

We believe that every church and ministry should be completely autonomous, but with accountability. Here is what we mean by accountability:

INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. You must have a constitution that outlines how you should function in the following areas?

- How the church government is structured
- How decision-making takes place
- How to obtain and remove a pastor
- How to obtain and remove an overseer
- How to manage Church finances in compliance with the State

2. Do you publicly give an account for the major decisions that have been made and allow your members to have input in the major decisions that you face as a church? Is there full financial disclosure? This is usually done at an annual meeting of the members.

3. Are there good record-keeping procedures in place, such as maintaining church minutes and bookkeeping?

4. Is someone other than the pastor looking after the finances of the church?

5. Is there a clear outline of how the authority of the church is structured?

EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Do you have someone known by the members as the overseer of the congregation?

2. Is he just a friend of the pastor, or is he a friend of the church?

3. Is he geographically accessible?

4. Who is he accountable to?

5. Are the limits of his authority and responsibilities clearly defined?

6. Is he accountable to a network himself?

I sat on a denominational credentialing committee for almost ten years. During that time, I realized that we could not really get to know the pastor who was being ordained or fully understand the needs of the congregation as well as the local church board could. For the most part, it was a shot in the dark. No one can convince me that those who served on this committee were any more spiritual, discerning, or concerned than those who sit on the board of a local church. Our level of risk was also far less than the leaders of the local church. After all, they would be the ones who had to live with the decision we made about the person who was pastoring them. Finally, we did not have any more authority from the Lord to do this than those in the local church had.

Somehow, having credentials with a denomination can give a false sense of connection. We all know that it is possible to have this legal bond, but not be in real relationship with the group that issued the papers. Some may argue that issuing credentials could give the larger body the authority to make sure the pastor conformed to a certain standard in his ministry. Wouldn't it be better to have the desire to conform come out of relationship and respect, rather than the threat of having papers revoked?

I have a number of handbooks and policies collected from various organizations that cover all the manifold regulations pertaining to the credentialing process. While some of it is well written, it could all be reduced to a single piece of paper if the local church were the ones who held the responsibility for the pastor's credentials.

The credentialing committee I worked on always had difficulties knowing when their authority came into play in the process of selecting a pastor. For example, if a church decided to call a pastor, they could not do it without our involvement. By the time all the parties gathered together to work at it, the process within the local church was well under way. If the church found a pastor they really wanted and our committee did not feel good about him, there was not much we could do about it. In fact, there were times we consented to a pastor being ordained that we didn't feel good about coming to a church, because of the congregation's desire.

Finally, if those who hold the credentials are not pleased with how a pastor is performing in his role, they can do more about it than a denominational board can. It was always interesting to note that no matter how big the handbooks were, they really did not have any teeth in them. This is not the case when a local church holds the credentials and it is clearly spelled out in the constitution how they can remove a dysfunctional pastor.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

We would work with a pastor and leadership of a local church to help them become accountable.

We can provide a sample of a good constitution to any church that is looking for one.

We believe each church should have an overseer who can help the church in difficult times.

In order to be considered accountable, we would expect any pastor who joins our network to become fully compliant within the first two years of joining Word of Grace.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN AN OVERSEER?

There are a number of things you should look for in an overseer, beyond what is listed in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1.

You should find an overseer who has accountability built into his own life and ministry.

His relationship with the Lord seems fresh and vital.

You should find someone who will be a friend of the church, not just a friend of the pastor.

You should find someone who has pastored growing congregations themselves.

If your church is a recent church planting, you should find someone who has experience in church planting. If your church is redeveloping an existing congregation, the overseer should have experience with that.

You should find someone who is geographically accessible. All long-range relationships should be on a short-term basis.

You will need to talk about what your expectations are, such as: how long will his term last, how often he will preach in the church; how often he should initiate visits with the pastor; is he expected to attend board meetings; is he expected to attend the annual meetings; should he receive church minutes; will he be compensated; at what rate will his travel expenses be reimbursed. You should also talk about how to handle disgruntled people from the congregation when they contact the overseer with a complaint.

THIS ROLE SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN YOUR CONSTITUTION

The limits, expectations, and qualifications of an overseer should be clearly stated in your constitution. It should also state how an overseer is added and removed. The overseer does not have to be a member of Word of Grace, but it is important that they have a real relationship with that local church and the pastors.

Here is an example of what one local church has put their constitution concerning the overseer:

The Overseer (Bishop) shall demonstrate a divine call to Pastoral ministry and have the qualifications described in First Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7. The Overseer shall be a Pastor to the Pastors and shall provide an objective source of counsel for the congregation.

a. The Overseer shall be consulted before any major change takes place in the life of our pastors or church.

- b. He shall be invited to attend the Annual Meetings of the church.
- c. He should initiate contact with the Senior Pastor or church leadership as often as agreed upon at the beginning of the term.

Elections and Appointments

The Elders shall appoint the Overseer for a term of three years, with a review.

Those placed in any position within the church shall assume their responsibilities upon election at the Annual Meeting.

Removing an Overseer

a. Any office may be declared vacant by a vote of the majority of those on the elders at any regular or special business meeting. Grounds for such action shall be:

- 1. Un-scriptural conduct;
- 2. Doctrinal departure from the tenets of faith;
- 3. Incompetence in office.

b. Any incumbent under charges shall have the opportunity for a fair and impartial hearing of his case before the assembly if he so desires.

c. The Elders are empowered to fill by appointment any irregular vacancy until the next annual election of any official capacities.

WHAT DOES LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY MEAN?

There has always been a tension between being autonomous and being accountable, especially when it comes to ordination and membership, which are the basis for speaking into each other's lives and ministries. Our Network is built in a way that ensures mutual accountability without encroaching on local autonomy. We believe that each mature* local church should be completely autonomous; that is, locally governed, locally credentialed, and locally supported.

1. LOCALLY GOVERNED

We do not want to have the kind of authority that allows us to come into a local church and tell them how to function or who their pastor should be. This authority should rest at the local church level. Our authority, or influence, comes from our example, teaching, and the advice we share when asked.

However, we do require that each pastor and affiliate church be able to show that they are truly accountable. This includes having a good working constitution to help guide the church in decision-making and that shows them how to properly change pastors. It would also involve having an overseer appointed who can help them through any difficulties that may arise.

Our leadership team does automatically provide oversight for all our pastors or churches, as our responsibility is to oversee the entire network. We would only provide specific oversight or pastoral care for a congregation if we were asked to do so on a short-term basis if they were in serious trouble. If this is case, our leadership team may require that a different approach to church government to be put in place, which we feel would improve the life and function of the local church. This level of involvement would only occur if a congregation was in a crisis.

Our leadership team would provide a consultation and pastoral care for the pastor, overseer, or churches if it was formally requested of us.

2. LOCALLY CREDENTIALLED

We think the ideal is that each local church should provide the credentials needed by their own pastors. Our goal would be to help the local church, so they could do this legally, and with responsibility. Word of Grace would only provide temporary credentials for a pastor that was in development or transition. We would also help any church we planted with this kind of assistance while are getting started.

3. LOCALLY SUPPORTED

Word of Grace Network does not own local church property or financially support pastors. Both of these would prevent the local church from truly being self-supporting and would require too much legislation, restriction, and oversight from our leaders.

In terms of accountability, we would want to know that each church is fiscally responsible and that they give a proper accounting to their members annually.

** A mature church is one that has developed to the stage that it can stand alone and has its own incorporation, constitution, and leadership in place.*

WHAT DOES APOSTOLIC MEAN TO YOU?

We not only believe that apostles still exist today, but we see their contribution as being vital to our church growth and development.

THE GIFT OF AN APOSTLE

The Greek word "*apostolos*" means "*one who is sent forth*" as a messenger and one who represent the name or authority of the person that he speaks for. The role of *an ambassador* is as close to this concept that we see today. The modern term 'missionary' is similar because both are "sent forth" but many denominational missionaries are not sent out with apostolic authority operating in their ministries. This prevents us from saying all missionaries are apostolic.

THREE CATEGORIES OF APOSTLES

There are three categories of apostles:

1. JESUS WAS THE CHIEF (FIRST) APOSTLE

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus..." (Hebrews 3:1)

Jesus serves as our foremost model of the ministry of the apostle. We can look to Him alone for the full expression of the apostolic ministry, as well as the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor/shepherd and the master teacher. When He ascended, He divided up His ministry into five parts and gave them to men so that no one could function alone and so that team ministry would be necessary to fully express His ministry in the earth.

2. THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE LAMB

"Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him." (Matthew 10:2-6)

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelations 21:14)

3. A LIST OF OTHER APOSTLES

When people hear the term "apostle", they usually think of the twelve apostles of Jesus and because have so elevated them in our thinking, it is difficult for us to consider that someone might be an apostle today, but they do exist. In fact, there were other apostles in the New

Testament other than the original Twelve. We know of 22 apostles mentioned in the Bible. Today, we should expect many more apostles to oversee the Church worldwide.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

These verses teach us that apostles were needed to help build up of the Body and that this would need to be done until we have attained to the unity of the faith. If this is the case, they are just as needed today as they were in the beginning of the church.

“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:28)

We are told that God has appointed them, but nowhere is it taught that the apostolic ministry has been *unappointed*. Apostles will be needed until the Church is perfected and presented to Jesus. Until then, every gift is needed to get this accomplished.

There are more than ten apostles specifically mentioned in the New Testament, besides the original twelve:

Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy: *“Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.”* (1 Thessalonians 2:6)

Barnabus: *“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out.”* (Acts 14:14)

Andronicus and Junia: *“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”* (Romans 16:7)

Titus and two unnamed brothers: *“If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 8:2)

(The word messengers used here is *apostolos*)

In Philippians 2:25, Paul referred to **Epaphroditus** as a messenger, which is also *apostolos*.

James, and possibly the other four natural brothers of the Lord Jesus were all considered to be apostles in 1 Corinthians 9:5, 15:5-8; Gal 1:19.

APOSTLES TODAY

In my opinion there are several apostles in modern history, such as Count Von Zinzendorf who was the leader of the Moravians; John Wesley, to the United Kingdom, Hudson Taylor to China; John G. Lake to South Africa; and John Wimber.

These days, there are many apostles who do not have the stature of these men, but are actual apostles:

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

The apostle has grace to minister each of the other four ministry gifts in a limited way: prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher. The apostle often will raise up pastors, evangelists, teachers, and other leaders to help them fulfill their calling. Often, the calling of an apostle is specific to a region or a people. Paul wrote that he was an apostle to the Gentiles and that Peter was an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). The apostle becomes a father to the work, and he may remain as head of the ministry with several leaders under him, or he may move on, as Paul did, turning the established work over to someone else. The apostle Paul is the best type to illustrate all of the statements above.

AN APOSTOLIC TEST

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. Do not marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

“I know your works, and your labour, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil: and you have tried those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars...” (Revelations 2:2)

Of course, in this day there are some who present themselves apostles. Even in the New Testament we find people doing this. Within the church at Ephesus, after Paul left, a number of people claimed to be apostles. In the book of Revelation, the Lord commended them for being able to distinguish between those who were true and false apostles. They had some kind of test. I wish I had a copy the one they used. If I were writing my own, I would hold up the person who claimed to be an apostle by the following characteristics:

Apostles have the grace upon their life to carry a revelation of Christ. In Ephesians 3:5, Paul speaks of the mystery *“...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:”*

One of the functions of an apostle is having the ability to unfold the revelation of the Church. Stated more simply, the greatest purpose apostolic is to bring a revelation of Jesus.

Apostles have the grace upon their father and mentor others. Paul told the Corinthian church, which he had planted: *“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”* (1 Corinthians 4:15-16)

Many of the apostolic ministries I have been met have the “feel” of being a “father”. Not only have they “begotten” and raised up sons in the faith, but they also have such a fatherly nurture and care that it makes younger ones want to be “adopted”.

Apostles are usually team players. While an apostle can sometimes seem to be a jack-of-all-trades; he knows the overall objective can best be served through a team effort. A survey of the apostle Paul’s ministry shows he always traveled with a team and mentioned many fellow-laborers in his letters by name.

Apostles are general contractors for the building of God. Paul called himself a master builder. The term “master builder” is actually “architekton” in the Greek language and is the derivative of our word “architect” who has the big picture. He knows what is to be built.

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:9-11)

Apostles usually have governmental authority. One of the consequences of being sent by God is having authority. If you are sent by God, you will have God’s authority backing you up.

“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power”. (1 Corinthians 4:19-20)

Paul was saying, in essence, “Talk is cheap, but let me see what power you carry”.

TITLES AND TERMINOLOGY

While we believe that there many today apostles today, we do not use this title when referring to each another or ourselves. We prefer to let the grace we carry speak for itself.

We believe that the elder who leads the church, which is called *the presiding elder*, or Senior Pastor holds the highest level of authority within a local church and all other five-fold ministry must defer to this office.

ANABAPTIST VALUES – OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

Most modern church groups draw their primary values from some movement that came out of the protestant history. Some draw inspiration from Luther, others from Calvin, while many others have drawn from Wesley. Many of the people who have been part of Word of Grace came from anabaptist backgrounds, such as Mennonites or Amish. We feel it is important to keep the best part of our heritage, honoring what God has imparted to us. In our case, we feel it is important to maintain the good example set for us by the early anabaptists, who made an invaluable contribution to the early Protestant Reformation. Some of their distinctives are still needed in the church today.

They believed that doing what Jesus said is central to our quality of life together. In a day when many people professed to be Christian, the Anabaptists insisted that you must show that you are a believer by actually doing what Jesus taught.

They believed that our relationships with others are a way of measuring the depth of our relationship with the Lord. The early Anabaptists seemed to put more of a premium on working at healthy personal relationships than most other groups at that time.

They believed in the priesthood of all believers. They did not believe in a domineering form of church government that controlled people's faith. The Anabaptists were some of the first to call for servant leadership. They also understood from scripture that everyone should do their part to minister to the spiritual needs of others, even if they didn't have the education required of priests.

They believed that there should be a great importance placed upon maintaining close and well-ordered communities and families. The Anabaptists wanted to get back to the Book of Acts, which meant having a strong sense of community where mutual aid was used to help each other. They cared for their own and stayed close together.

They believed that the weapons of their warfare were not carnal. They understood that Jesus taught and demonstrated non-resistance because He knew that this would effectively stop the devil. Ours is a spiritual conflict, which needs to be fought by spiritual means.

HISTORY OF THE ANABAPTISTS

During the latter part of the 1500s, there was a large, leaderless renewal movement that swept through Europe. It was made up mostly of young people who wanted to experience wholehearted biblical fidelity as seen in the book of Acts. They were not part of the Reformation that was spearheaded by Luther, neither did they feel they were protesting against the Catholic Church. They saw themselves as a third-way movement.

While most of the participants of the Reformation were still practicing infant baptism as a means of Christianizing people, these young radicals insisted on rebaptizing adult believers who

had come into a personal experience of faith in Christ. This, as well as other attempts to become New Testament believers, caused them to be persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants alike. The Swiss and German reformers actually joined forces with the Roman Catholics to stamp out these *rebaptizers* or *Anabaptists* as they were called. From this movement came the Baptist and Brethren Churches today, as well as other non-liturgical religious groups that exist around the world.

In time, a former priest named Menno Simons helped the Anabaptists put a biblical foundation under their movement, largely through his writings. From this time on, those Anabaptists who subscribed to his teaching were known as *Mennonites*.

The early Mennonites were persecuted for what they believed, and many were martyred. They decided that their response would be biblical even in the face of persecution. So, they refused to take up arms to defend themselves from the Reform and Catholic coalition set against them, both of whom used the soldiers of the state as an instrument of punishment for these "heretics." Many were young people and were murdered by the army. From this, they developed their original stand of non-resistance and strong insistence of separation of church and state. After about twenty-five years of non-stop persecution, many fled to Russia and North America, where religious freedom awaited them.

As a religious movement, Mennonites have had their spiritual highs and lows. There have been times when many churches held tradition above Scripture and have gotten sidetracked by legalism and rule-keeping. And like any church or movement, there is a constant need for renewal and realignment. A 1987-88 survey conducted by the Mennonite Board of Missions estimated that one-third of the Mennonite Church had participated in the Charismatic Renewal over three decades.²

RENEWAL

As a religious movement, Mennonites have had their spiritual highs and lows. As with any church, there is a constant need for renewal and realignment. A 1987-88 survey conducted by the Mennonite Board of Missions estimated that one-third of the Mennonite Church had participated in the Charismatic Renewal over these past three decades. This included the Lewis County Mennonites, from which came the first five couples who started Rhema Fellowship.

Like the young radicals from early anabaptist history, we are committed to becoming more and more like the church in the Book of Acts, maintaining a strong Biblical foundation, standing for what we believe, and promoting the need for constant renewal. We also enthusiastically participate in what God is doing throughout His great Body today. Our love for the brotherhood allows us to traverse many different organizational lines. This is evident in the fact that our membership is encouraged to maintain the various affiliations they have benefited from in the Body, and that we find our basis for fellowship around our common quest for New Testament Christianity.

ADDITIONAL DISTINCTIVES

Today, most mainline churches would agree with the list of beliefs above, without necessarily accepting the extremes to which some Mennonites have taken them at times. Many Anabaptists and early Mennonites would add the following distinctives as important beliefs:

- **They believed in the primacy of the New Testament:** The Anabaptists and early Mennonites believed that both the Old and New Testaments were God’s infallible and Holy Word. In this, they agreed with other Protestants, but they also held that the New Testament has superseded the Old Testament as a religious system. All doctrine, they insisted, must have a New Testament basis.
- **The Sermon on the Mount received special emphasis:** It was in this view of the relation of the Testaments that they grounded their high ethical demands. The Old Testament permitted hating your enemies, swearing oaths, divorce, and polygamy, but God has now given a more complete revelation of His will for men. It is, therefore, not right to set aside the higher ethic of the New Testament in favor of that which God once permitted because of the “hardness of heart” of the ancient Israelites. The leading reformers considered this interpretation heresy and proceeded to try to wipe out Anabaptism with force—the same way the ancient Israelites handled their enemies.
- **They believed that good works were important:** Many reformers rested on faith alone to save them. Anabaptists were trusting in God’s grace for their salvation, too, but they had no tolerance for those who claimed to be justified by faith while living unfaithful lives. Anabaptists pointed out that Scripture says, *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20).
- **They had a strong commitment to evangelism:** They were bold in their witness, which was quite unique in a day when there was little zeal for public evangelism.
- **They believed in having disciplined lives:** The Anabaptists felt that disciplines of discipleship should be a part of our daily lives. They maintained regular times of private devotion in an age when most people only prayed or listened to Scripture in church.
- **They believed in Scripture alone:** Anabaptists were usually more consistent than other reformers in their insistence on having biblical authority for their beliefs and practices.

- **The believed in the separation of Church and state:** Anabaptists correctly saw that the Church was the assembly of the redeemed, not something that was to be under the management of the government.

Here are a few tenets that we practice as did the early Anabaptists:

- **We believe in a believers' baptism:** Anabaptists were among the first to point out the lack of explicit biblical support for infant baptism. They insisted that only those who trust in Jesus Christ for their personal salvation should be baptized.
- **We believe that all believers should follow Jesus' example of being baptized in water because the Father required it of everyone as a way to demonstrate our obedience to Him:** We prefer the practice of immersion, so we can follow Jesus' own example.

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water. (Matthew 3:16)

Now when they came up out of the water. (Acts 8:39)

- **We believe that babies and young children should be dedicated to the Lord rather than be baptized or christened.**
- **Like the young radicals from early Anabaptist history, we are committed to becoming more and more like the church in the book of Acts, maintaining a strong biblical foundation, standing for what we believe, and promoting the need for constant renewal.** We also enthusiastically participate in what God is doing throughout His great Body today. Our love for the brotherhood allows us to traverse many different organizational lines. This is evident in the fact that our membership is encouraged to maintain the various affiliations they have benefited from in the Body, and that we find our basis for fellowship around our common quest for New Testament Christianity.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Here are some answers to the questions most commonly asked about Word of Grace Network:

WHAT DO YOU REQUIRE OF MEMBERS?

Membership within Word of Grace Network is made up of those who are in five-fold ministry, who serve here or overseas. We also accept those who serve in the congregation as worship leaders, youth workers, or those who have some kind of special ministry within the local church. As a member, you will be invited to give input in our major decisions our leadership team makes on behalf of the network.

Before you commit, you need to know what we can expect from each other.

WHAT STEPS DO I TAKE?

To initiate the process of joining Word of Grace, please fill-out an application so we can learn more about you. An appointment will be arranged for you to meet with one of our leadership team. You must agree with our statement of faith and we hope that you walk with an open heart concerning the other doctrinal positions that are important to us. Read through the material here carefully, as it can help you decide if we are the right group for you.

Because our goal is to build close relationships, we want to get to know you. This takes time, so we require that all pastors to go through a waiting period where we can walk together in order to see how deep your commitment is to our values and vision.

The pastor becomes the legal member of Word of Grace, not the church. The church is simply affiliated with us.

Churches that are planted by Word of Grace will automatically become eligible to be a part of our network.

Please attach a short (1-2 pages) of personal biography aimed at helping us get to know you. Attach your churches constitution.

Give the name of your overseer. (even a proposed name)

E-mail these to: penn@wellspringfellowship.com

When making your monthly contribution, please make your checks payable to:
Word of Grace Network and send them to LaReta Riehl (Our Treasurer)
3800 Route 14A Penn Yan, NY 14527

ADDITIONAL DOCTRINAL POSITIONS

There are a number of important doctrinal positions we have taken which they feel you should carefully consider before joining our network. While you must accept everything in our Statement of Faith in order to be a member, these are additional doctrinal positions we want our members to move towards.

ELDERS RULE: We believe in headship in all things. This is modeled in the Godhead, established in the natural family, set up by God in Israel, used in the synagogue and ordained for the Church in the New Testament (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The "eldership" form of government, with a senior pastor or chief elder presiding over the flock, is the preferred way to provide leadership in the church. The elders are to the Church what parents are to a family. They are the spiritual parents of the local assembly and are responsible before God to raise up and equip the members of the church to be able to function in their God ordained callings. You can ask for our paper on this. You can read my book, Pillars of Authority to learn more about this.

SPIRITUAL HEADSHIP: We believe that every believer in Christ must be subject to God's authority in a specific local church for spiritual protection and long-term fruitfulness. (Hebrews 13:17).

Training for Ministry in the Local Church. We believe that much of the teaching and values emphasized in the seminaries is not suitable for developing solid pastoral leaders and church planters. We encourage more local training of our leaders. You can read my book, Honoring Headship to learn more about this.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY: In our minds, it is without question that women can function in ministry, as supported both by scripture and church history. However, each church would be responsible to determine within themselves how far they would allow a woman to function in the government and pastoral offices within their own local church. You can ask for our paper on this. As for women speaking in church, you can read my book Five Keys and Honoring Headship.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: We do not want to add anything more to the confusion of conscience that already exists in many pastors and church members today concerning the divisive subject of divorce and remarriage. Neither do we want to add any more to the statistics that document the staggering amount of divorce and remarriage that already has occurred both within our churches and society, so we ask our pastor's pledge to abstain from encouraging either divorce or remarriage until they have done the following things:

- They have meditated deeply upon what Jesus and Paul taught about the subject.
- They have looked at the fruit of divorce and remarriage.
- They have a clear conscience on the position they hold.
- They have shared their position openly with their congregation.

You can read my book about this to learn how we arrived at our position.

WORD OF GRACE APPLICATION

(This application is for North American residents only)

Date of Application: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Your Full Name: _____

Your Preferred Name: _____

Home Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Cell Number: _____

Office Number: _____

Home Number: _____

Church Name: _____

Church Address: _____

Church Web Address: _____

FAMILY INFORMATION
(use more paper if need be)

Your Marital Status: _____

Your Spouses Name: _____

When were you married? _____

Have you been faithful to your wedding vows? _____

Do you have excessive debt or poor credit score? _____

Your Date of Birth: _____

Your children's names and birthdays: _____

Tell us about your ministry:

What do you feel your primary calling is?

Can you explain your ministry more fully?

What year did you begin full-time ministry?

Do you maintain a regular Sabbath day other than Sunday?

Please give a chronological history of your ministry:

List any special giftings or grace that you can contribute to the network:

What is your vision for ministry:

Please list three references with their contact information. These should be people who know you well:

Why do you want to join Word of Grace?

Have you gone over all the material on this carefully?

Do you have any concerns or questions about what you read?

Do you have any on-going issues or spiritual concerns we should be aware of?

We are based in the Beautiful Finger Lake region of central New York State.

E-mail this application to: penn@wellspringfellowship.com

Please make all donations payable to:

Word of Grace Network

Attention Treasurer: LaReta Riehl

3800 Route 14A

Penn Yan, NY

14527

ANNUAL EVENTS

In the past we have had annual events which we everyone is encouraged to attend. These meetings are also open to our guest. At our 2019 spring convention we will decide what events we will build into our calendars for the foreseeable future.

Our Spring Leadership Conference which is held in Penn Yan New York each spring. These meetings are open to anyone who is in ministry, preparing for ministry, or in leadership within the local church.

Our Summer CampMeeting is usually held near Penn Yan. This is something for the whole family.

Our Fall Pastor's Campout usually takes place in September.

Our Couples Retreat is for our pastors and their wives

Our Youth Gathering is an event designed to help our young people to network among themselves.