
Strengthening Gifts

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Introduction and context

Advance partner churches are committed to the New Testament model of ministry gifts given for the strengthening of the church. These gifts, both from within and from outside the local church, build up and bring maturity, accountability, and edification to the church.

This document helps to explore the gifts we see in scripture and our use of the broader term 'strengtheners', a term we use for all those who help and serve our churches. While we affirm that local elders are called and responsible for leading the local church, we encourage every church to consider carefully and define who they invite to serve as strengtheners within their context.

We want to continue the pattern exemplified by Paul in Philippians where he commends the local church for their 'partnership in the gospel' (Phil 1:3-5). Therefore, we also address 'church-to-church' partnerships and how churches not only receive, but could also participate in sending leaders to be a blessing beyond themselves.

Before beginning the process outlined in this document we would suggest that each of your elders first gain clarity on the 'why' behind it. While the questions below touch briefly on this, this subject is more fully set out in the [About Advance](#) booklet which provides a more comprehensive theological and practical framing of why and how we aim to partner as a movement of churches. Please consider working prayerfully through that document as an eldership team before continuing with this document.

WHY DO CHURCHES NEED THESE GIFTS?

Whether yours is a new church plant or an older existing church, whether a smaller church or a mega-church, our churches all have this in common: they have evidence of grace that needs calling out and blind spots that need revealing and help overcoming. They also have the need for meaningful relationships with other churches and a broader connection to the global church. All churches need outside gifts to help us in these matters.

WHEN DO CHURCHES NEED THESE GIFTS?

You need them at the beginning of a church plant. You need them when trouble arises. You also need them in times of peace and prosperity. It is often in times of peace when churches drift the most from the gospel and gospel mission. If you wait until a crisis before asking for help, you may lack the relational bridge strong enough to carry the weight of truth when it's most needed.

WHAT IS THE HOPE BEHIND WELCOMING THESE GIFTS INTO YOUR CHURCH?

The hope is clear: *so that you would be strengthened*. The purpose of these gifts, when working properly, is that the church would be equipped and built up. These gifts are from the risen Jesus to help your church. This means that you should be able to look over your shoulder after a visit or years of visits, and see how you, your team, and your church have indeed been strengthened and are better positioned to carry out the mission of Jesus.

Biblical examples of churches being strengthened:

- ▶ Peter and John strengthened the new believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14-25)
- ▶ Peter built up churches in various regions (Acts 9:31-32)
- ▶ Barnabas relocated to Antioch to strengthen the work there (Acts 11:19-23)
- ▶ Barnabas recruited Paul to help him strengthen Antioch (Acts 11:25-26)
- ▶ Prophets from Jerusalem strengthened the Antioch church (Acts 11:27-28)
- ▶ Antioch sent an offering for famine relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30)
- ▶ Macedonia and Achaia also contributed (Rom. 15:25-26), as did Galatia and Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-3)
- ▶ Jerusalem released John Mark to help Barnabas and Paul (Acts 12:25)
- ▶ Lystra released Timothy to help Paul (Acts 16:1-3)
- ▶ Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:21-23), and strengthened the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41). “The churches were strengthened in the faith” (Acts 16:4-5) and encouraged (Acts 20:1-2)
- ▶ Paul sent delegates to help strengthen churches (Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 2 Cor. 8:17-19; Phil. 2:19-29)
- ▶ Paul’s dual commitment to planting and strengthening is reflected in his longing to preach Christ where He had not been preached (Rom. 15:20), and his longing for Christ to be fully ‘formed’ in believers (Gal. 4:19). Paul implies that local church strength is a prerequisite for churches to be planted in regions beyond (2 Cor. 10:15-16). Paul knew that if churches were not well-founded, they couldn’t easily send the gospel further.

Now, let's look at the gifts, as described in the letter to the Ephesians:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12)

The recognition and role of the apostolic in Advance

Advance is a movement committed to planting and strengthening churches. We believe that it is apostolic ministry that is catalytic in driving this gospel work. Because this can be confusing for many, it is important that we clearly explain how we understand the role of apostolic gifting operating among us.

WHAT DO APOSTLES DO?

Firstly, it is central that we recognise our primary understanding of apostolic ministry as missional, which is explicitly expressed in the term 'apostle' meaning 'sent one'. This 'sending' refers to the activity of either temporarily or permanently stepping out of local church life to establish or catalyse gospel activity in another context.

In Acts 13:1-3 we read that the church at Antioch was characterised by having prophets and teachers within it. It was only when Barnabas and Saul were set apart for the work to which they were called that they were sent and entered apostolic ministry.

Our friend David Devenish (from the Newfrontiers team) has helpfully taught on what apostles do, namely:

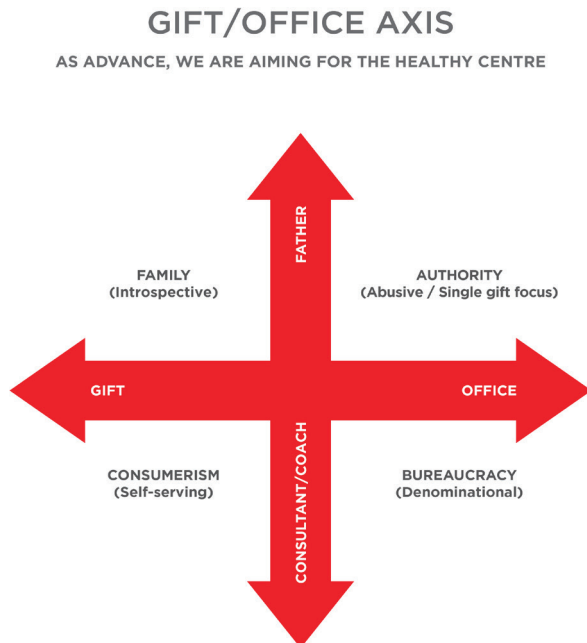
- ▶ Bring understanding of revelation concerning the overall purposes of God in the earth (Rom.16:25)
- ▶ Ensure proper foundations are in place in churches (Eph. 2:20)
- ▶ Appoint team leadership in churches (Titus 1:5)
- ▶ Become like fathers to the churches and to the leaders of those churches (Phil. 2:22; Titus 1:4)
- ▶ Ensure ongoing care for churches (1 Tim. 1:3-5)

- ▶ Involve the churches they serve in the wider mission to the unreached regions of the earth (Rom. 15:24)
- ▶ Bring contextualised wisdom (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1)
- ▶ Have a Kingdom mentality (Rom. 16:26)
- ▶ Are very concerned for the poor (Gal. 2:10)
- ▶ Are deeply concerned for the unity as well as the maturity of the church (Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:14)
- ▶ Function as a team (Acts 12:1-3; 2 Cor. 2:12-13)

In recognising and embracing these characteristics of apostolic ministry we want to answer three questions that arise:

1. When is the use of the term ‘apostle’ appropriate?
2. How are apostles recognised and authorised to operate into local churches?
3. What does apostolic team leadership look like in Advance ?

The following diagram is helpful in illustrating some of the tensions that exist around these questions.



THE GIFT/ OFFICE AXIS

We believe that the Ephesians 4 gifts have always functioned in the Church, even if they have often been referred to by different labels. We prefer to use biblical categories and terminology and do not shy away from using the designations of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. However, we also recognise that seeking to recover biblical categories and experiences has resulted in narrow definitions of the gifts. For example, 'Apostle' can become a letterhead-label that is more a mark of status than genuine ministry or gift.

As Ephesians 4:12 makes clear, the purpose of the gifts is to equip churches so that they are genuinely apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and well taught. We understand that gifting can be present in a church without having to be tied to a particular ministry office and we want to see the fruit of these gifts operating in all the churches; displayed by all kinds of people. For example, there might be many people in a church who feel a great concern for the poor and are gifted in serving them, which is an apostolic characteristic, without themselves being apostles.

However, if we swing the pendulum all the way over to the gifting side, away from the office side, we risk losing the impact that genuine Ephesians 4 gifts can make. We risk ending up with a diluted version which would place severe limitations on our mission. So we need to operate both with a generous 'as anyone is gifted let them ...' framework, but also expect substantial apostolic gifts among us who do exercise an authoritative function.

THE FATHER/CONSULTANT AXIS

There should be a fatherly component to apostolic ministry, but this can be overplayed. While we see that Paul's model sometimes involved spending extended periods with churches (from weeks to months to even years), expecting a 'father' to do the equivalent in our settings, getting to know individuals in the congregation deeply, and ministering for weeks in the church, can be unrealistic and potentially undermine the responsibilities entrusted to elders.

While Paul did spend extended seasons in some of the churches (Ephesus, Corinth), there were others he was with only briefly (for example, spending just three weeks with the Thessalonians) or did not seem to visit at all, yet still felt apostolically responsible for (as was the case with the church in Colossae). This was why Paul instructed that elders should be appointed in every town, precisely because it was meant to be the responsibility of the elders to 'father' the churches on a day-to-day basis.

On the other side of this pendulum swing, though, is apostolic ministry as consultant. This can be reduced to essentially asking someone to come into our churches to give management or church growth tips. While this can have value, it is not apostolic. These transactions lack the missional, relational, and spiritual dynamic of true apostolic ministry.

FAMILY, AUTHORITY, BUREAUCRACY, CONSUMERISM

Of course, any 2-axis diagram is overly simplistic, but, in general terms, these four quadrants represent different ways we might lean as we seek to be apostolic.

The Office/Consultant quadrant

A movement in which 'office' is particularly emphasised and outside input functions primarily as a consultancy will become bureaucratic. Inevitably, this will happen in denominations: labels become all-important, and processes and red-tape consuming.

The Gift/Consultant quadrant

If the emphasis leans too heavily towards recognising everyone's gift alongside inviting outside consultants, the result will be a consumeristic movement. What can I get out of this? How can I be helped to be a better version of me? This leads to the prosperity gospel and 'mile-wide, inch-deep' Christianity.

The Father/Gift quadrant

Where the emphasis is allowing everyone's gifts to flourish and having strong fatherly input, a genuine sense of family can develop. This is clearly good, but the downside can be when this morphs into something overly introspective and cosy. If everyone is having a good time using their gifts with the security of a father figure overseeing things, why bother to reach people who might unsettle the happy family?

The Father/Office quadrant

A strong emphasis on fathering combined with an emphasis on office is likely to result in an authoritarian movement. In practice, only a handful of people are actively involved. The potential for abuse is especially high in this model.

THE HEALTHY CENTRE

On this diagram we should be somewhere near the centre of the two axes.

▶ We want to:

1. Recognise and release apostolic ministry that functions with real authority.
2. Recognise and release the Ephesians 4 gifting present in all our churches but which is not tied to office.
3. Receive input in our churches that helps with the practical issues of church life and leadership.
4. Recognise men who do have a genuinely fatherly role across the movement.

This centre helps us recognise who is apostolic among us and clarifies their role.

Having explored this we can return to our three questions:

1. When the use of the term ‘apostle’ is appropriate

We see certain people recognised and called apostles in the New Testament, and we are comfortable using the term today, when we see someone operating in the full measure of the gift as enumerated in David Devenish’s list. Overall though, we prefer to be a movement defined by the activity of the apostolic, rather than the appointment of apostles.

2. How apostles are recognised and authorised to operate into local churches

Our movement is led by a global team of apostolically recognised men, who team closely with other recognised Ephesians 4 gifts, and a broader group of church ‘strengtheners’. The recognition of these apostolic men begins with the way in which they are received and serve in local churches, is confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, and affirmed by the other members of the global team.

It is important to note that in the New Testament, we see those who were clearly apostolic, but displayed considerably different strengths and personalities, and were recognised in different ways by different groups. For example, the contrast between Paul and Barnabas. Because of this, we are comfortable acknowledging that there isn’t a cookie-cutter model for recognising apostolic gifting. Elders need to do this for their local church and then the global team will recognise those who we see serving as apostles more broadly across our movement.

While we primarily work through geographical spheres which provide proximity for partnership and regular rhythms of connection, we also recognise that apostolic relationships often transcend these geographical boundaries. Churches are free to connect with, invite, and look to other recognised apostolic gifts outside of their immediate geographical sphere, while they simultaneously prioritise local hub activities for continued partnership and participation in their area.

3. What apostolic team leadership looks like in Advance

The global team leads the movement in plurality, while recognising that different members carry distinct roles. As with all teams, we see the merit in a team leader who leads the team in leading the movement. The role of the team leader is to strengthen the global team by helping to catalyse and clarify seasonal vision and by stewarding the culture, call, and contribution of our global family of churches.

All those who serve on the global team are in some way recognised as apostolic men, functioning with authority, helping release Ephesians 4 gifts in the churches, providing strengthening to churches, and serving them in an ‘older brother’ or ‘fatherly’ role. However, we are less concerned with the title of apostle than we are with teaming together to prioritise the activity of the apostolic.

A biblical example

In the account of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, we see an example of apostolic ministry that we seek to emulate.

Acts 20:26-38 (ESV)

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.”

Insights we can draw from this passage (and other interactions we see between Paul and the churches) include the following:

Apostolic leaders should have a ‘standing invitation’ to serve the local church in the following ways:

- ▶ Inspire mission
- ▶ Help to mature the church
- ▶ Care for leaders and the wellbeing of the church
- ▶ Catalyse the church to more
- ▶ Help protect and guide through difficult situations
- ▶ Hold elders accountable
- ▶ Help strengthen biblical gospel value
- ▶ Help in recognizing and raising leaders
- ▶ Help elders with foundational theological matters
- ▶ Help resolve relational challenges in leadership and team

They must have:

- ▶ Similar doctrines and values (emphasis and style)
- ▶ Genuine relationship (with as many elders as possible, not just the lead elder)
- ▶ Naturally be experienced as being ‘fatherly’ or ‘older brotherly’ to the elders
- ▶ Have recognised and suitably gifted leadership to play this role in the context
- ▶ A genuine heart to serve into the church and team (not a desire for position or profile)

The local church will then aim to extend to them:

- ▶ A recognition of spiritual authority, not over, but invited into both the leadership and the church
- ▶ A warm invitation to genuine relationships and rhythms of investment
- ▶ A real sense of teaming with them, especially in the important matters and moments
- ▶ A formal invitation to hold the eldership team accountable for their leadership of the church

Understanding apostolic and prophetic foundations

In Ephesians 2:20, Paul writes that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul uses a similar metaphor but expresses it differently: “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

These verses raise several exegetical issues. This document is not intended as a technical paper, but given the issues raised, it is helpful to briefly explain our understanding of them.

One dispute concerns the term ‘cornerstone’ in Ephesians 2. There is an unresolved scholarly debate as to whether this describes a stone that lies at the bottom of a building or if it is the capstone which completes the top of the building. There is an ambiguity here, but in the final analysis, the point Paul is stressing is that Christ is the most important stone. This is reinforced by the imagery of Christ being the foundation described in 1 Corinthians 3. This metaphor is drawn from Isaiah 28:16 and is also used by Peter in 1 Peter 2:4-6:

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Another issue is the identity of the apostles and prophets described in Ephesians 2 and particularly whether ‘prophets’ refers to those ministering in the Old Testament or the New. Here, the scholarly consensus is clearer: the apostles and prophets are two types of minister, active in the church at the time of Paul’s writing. This interpretation is reinforced by the way Paul describes the ministry of the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 3:5 and 4:11 and in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

A third question concerns the foundation itself. To the Ephesians, Paul writes that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, not that they lay the foundation. In contrast, his letter to the Corinthians says that he laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Here we probably need to see some bandwidth in Paul’s metaphor. The key point is that churches must be established on a solid foundation. What

is that foundation? Ultimately it is Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, but that foundation is put into practice and reinforced through the witness and work of the apostles and prophets. Without Christ as the cornerstone, the building will be unstable. Paul states that apostles and prophets play a foundational role in ensuring that the gospel is clearly in place and is faithfully built upon.

So the fourth issue to be addressed is: was that foundation established once and for all by Paul and the other New Testament apostles and prophets? Or is it the work of apostles and prophets today to be that foundation in a similar way as we plant and strengthen churches?

Perhaps the best way to approach this is firstly to recognise the unique role and position of 'the 12 + Paul.' Clearly, there was a unique calling and contribution to the first generation of apostles and prophets. But, secondly, we discern in scripture an expectation of the ongoing work of foundation laying that is needed in every generation. Churches must be built on the foundation of the original apostolic and prophetic message, but that requires the ongoing ministry of all the gifts today. Something of this dynamic is seen in 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul describes the ongoing work of building. Every established church needs to continue to be well built, and every new church we start needs good foundations to be laid down.

Practically, Paul probably uses the term 'apostles and prophets' as a shorthand term for all the gifts, somewhat analogous to how we, in Advance, use the term 'strengtheners' to describe the varied work of different gifts. We see elsewhere that Paul's various gift lists do not align perfectly. For example, because 1 Corinthians 12:28 doesn't mention evangelists and pastors that does not mean they are unnecessary or unimportant. Of course not. In the early years of the Church, it seems that prophets, alongside apostles, had a particular role in pioneering, ground-breaking ministry. However, we shouldn't draw hard lines between the gifts. We'd also want evangelists involved in pioneering work so that people get saved, teachers involved so that people are well instructed, and pastors involved so that people are well cared for. There is a natural tension in pushing for clarity around the specific gifts while recognising the flexible and overlapping boundaries and functions in ministry contexts.

Recognising apostolic gifts to our church

We must recognise that 'history', 'measure of gift', and 'proximity' all play substantial roles in shaping the nature of relationships between apostolic ministry and churches. Given this, it is essential that when inviting a gift into our churches there is clarity around 'who they are to us' and 'who we are to them'.

1. PRIMARY APOSTOLIC VOICE

Local elders should ask: where do we recognise our most genuine, experienced, and accessible apostolic relationship? Is there any 'Pauline-like' role and relationship in our story? Is there a 'father' who may have founded the church or walked a long road with us, or an older brother who has walked with us, encouraged us, and guided us along the way? Is there someone whose external voice and influence is most recognised and celebrated in our eldership team and church?

2. OTHER APOSTOLIC VOICES

Local elders should ask: how do we best develop current and future relationships with other gifts and voices? Are there current relationships with strengthening gifts that we hope will deepen over time so that in the years to come they too may have a depth of relationship and voice into our team and story?

Ideally, we believe that every church should have two or three apostolic voices involved for breadth of input, perspective and relationship, but also to ensure continuity of care if a single person is unable to serve for a season.

3. OTHER APOSTOLIC VISITS

It is important for us to distinguish others who, from time to time, may visit our church as more broadly recognised apostolic voices. We may be able to benefit from these men, despite not looking to them in the same way as the above categories. We can happily welcome them, receive from them, and enjoy our times together without extending our expectations of them beyond that visit or specific investment. We do well to continue to make them aware of our primary father/older brother and other apostolic voices.

While we recognise that much of this takes time to assess and develop, another way of picturing this is with the family language of friends, brothers, and fathers.

- ▶ **A friend** is welcomed into a church on an ad hoc basis to offer help, encouragement and ideas. A church can happily welcome them, receive from them, and enjoy times together without extending expectations of them.
- ▶ **A brother** has a closer relationship with the church and would hopefully be around for and involved in key family moments, such as the appointment of elders. Our expectation is that all partner churches can identify at least one of these brotherly gifts from within the Hub they are part of. These gifts should develop a growing relationship with the elders, wider leadership team, and congregation.

- ▶ **An older brother or father** whose voice exercises more weight in the church, and while not supplanting the elders, would be received as an authoritative voice. Some of our churches have an ongoing relationship with the person who played the initial role as founder and foundation layer, or with someone who didn't start the church but has had a long and fruitful fathering influence in it. This gives that person a vital and primary Pauline-like role and relationship in that church's story and an important voice and rich apostolic relationship that has been enjoyed over many years. This relationship should be invested in, invited in, and developed for as long as the Lord allows.

If you are in the process of discerning how you see and receive a particular person, the following question may help to clarify the relationship and how your eldership team views their role in your church.

Do you ask 'What do you think?', or do you ask 'What should we do?'.

The second question reveals that you see this person as carrying a more authoritative voice.

Who are we to them?

It is also important to recognise that every apostolic leader has a capacity and limit to the number of churches they can help and serve. Therefore, it is important that in any strengthening relationship it is also clear what the expectations of the church are and that the leader has clarified what their capacity is to help. Painful misunderstandings can arise if a church expects ongoing oversight when the invited leader sees their role as a one-off Sunday visit, or vice versa. Apostolic leaders need to gain their own clarity about their capacity to respond to invitations and which churches they are helping, which they are befriending, and which they are fathering.

Eldership Team - Question 1:

Who do we or could we see functioning in these ways within the life of our team, our marriages, and our church?

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Understanding the other Ephesians 4 gifts

THE GIFT OF THE PROPHET

The second set of gifted people whom Christ provides to the church is prophets. This does not refer to the Old Testament prophets or the prophetic texts they wrote (e.g., Rom. 1:2; 3:21), but to new covenant people through whom God speaks. Paul lists this gift in the three other passages where he enumerates spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 28-30). He told the Corinthians that a person who prophesies speaks to people 'for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort' (1 Cor. 14:3) and builds up the church (14:4,5). It is thus easy to see how the operation of this gift was vital as churches were being planted, especially where there was intense opposition that could lead to profound discouragement.

Prophecy sometimes also included an element of foretelling, as can be seen in the case of the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), who predicted the Judean famine as well as Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. Although Paul says that prophecy is primarily for the benefit of believers (1 Cor. 14:22), he does explain how God can reveal the secrets of the heart of an unbeliever through prophecy, which results in the person turning his heart to God (1 Cor. 14:24-25). In spite of the danger of false prophecy (see, e.g., 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1), Paul warns the Thessalonian church not to set aside this gift (1 Thess. 5:20-22). Rather, they should exercise discernment to see what is good and what is evil (what is from the Lord and what is not). In Paul's view, prophecy is a gift that should be eagerly sought (1 Cor. 14:1) because it edifies the community of believers.

David Devenish suggests certain roles prophetic ministry could play today:

- ▶ Bringing the cutting edge of God's purposes; the 'now' word for the church internationally, nationally, and specifically for the local church
- ▶ Bringing a sense of vision and direction
- ▶ Seeing through issues
- ▶ Imparting gifting and producing a church which moves in the charismatic gifts
- ▶ Discerning gifting either through a tested prophetic word or by picking things up

In Advance, we encourage that all prophetic words must be weighed, even if they come from a recognised prophet and we are wary of churches that are all vision, but don't see anything built. We trust that prophets and the contribution of the prophetic

will 'build up' and catalyse mission and you may want to consider inviting those gifted and recognised in this way into your local church, especially in seasons of seeking to discern God's way forward, or when trying to break into new territory, or through local barriers as a church.

THE GIFT OF THE EVANGELIST

Evangelists are those individuals within the churches whom the ascended Christ has especially gifted to make known the redemptive message of the gospel. Luke referred to Philip as one who was gifted in this fashion in Acts 21:8, calling him 'Philip the evangelist'. And we see in Acts 8 an example of Philip bringing the gospel to a new people group, before finally settling in Caesarea.

Paul also more broadly appeals to Timothy to 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim. 4:5). We believe that the work of the evangelist is not only to proclaim the gospel, but also to help equip other believers in the church to share their faith and to grow in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12).

The clearest demonstrations of an evangelistic gift are a sustained zeal in witnessing, regular fruit in conversion, and a passion to help others grow in confidence and fruitfulness in their witness. It is valuable to regularly invite those gifted in this area, as living with the lost in mind with courage and conviction about sharing our faith often leaks out of our lives and our people over time. Evangelists will help to keep this front and centre in our lives and churches and to stir fresh passion and prioritisation for our local churches in this regard.

THE GIFT OF THE PASTOR

In spite of its popularity as a title for ministers in contemporary Protestant churches, the term pastor ('shepherd') is actually rare in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 is, in fact, the only time that it is used for a class of church leaders. Both Peter and the writer of Hebrews use it as a title for Jesus himself (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25), but neither writer uses it to refer to ministers. Paul did, however, use the imagery of shepherding one other time, when he addressed the elders of the Ephesian church: Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock (Acts 20:28-29; see also 1 Pet. 5:2).

This image of 'pastor/shepherd' probably stems from Jesus himself, who taught that he was 'the good shepherd' (John 10:1-18), but then commissioned Peter (and, by exten-

sion, others in leadership in the church) to ‘feed my sheep’ and ‘take care of my sheep’ (John 21:15-17).

From Jesus’ example in his Good Shepherd discourse, we know that this involves knowing people intimately (John 10:3,14), leading them (John 10:4), protecting them from ‘wolves’ (John 10:7-10, 11-13), and loving them enough to sacrifice one’s life for them (John 10:11-13, 15). As the good shepherd, Jesus’ leadership contrasted sharply with the many bad shepherds Israel had throughout her history (Ezek. 34; Jer. 23:1-3). Jeremiah prophesied a time when God would ‘give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding’ (Jer. 3:15).

The use of the term suggests that this pastoral role in the local church involves a great deal of care, concern, and godly instructive leadership of the people. In this sense, we see this as synonymous with the office of overseer/elder in the local church, since Paul in Acts 20 charged the Ephesian elders (also called overseers) with the task of pastoring. At the same time, we are also convinced that some individuals are particularly gifted in this area. We see the reach of their pastoral contribution being recognised with other churches inviting them to provide the same type of care, concern, and godly instructive leadership to leaders in other churches.

Building a relational and familial global movement of churches is greatly strengthened and served by the pastorally gifted amongst us. And a local church may recognise the need for specific investment into vital areas of the church, like marriages, a culture of care, life on life discipleship making, hospitality, developing a relational team culture, navigating complex relationships, or dispelling tensions. These areas in the local church are well served by inviting in gifted and recognised pastors to come and pastor the local pastors.

Because this kind of care necessitates godly instruction, we would also see the teaching of sound doctrine as an integral part of pastoral ministry. This ensures that both the flock and their local shepherds are equipped to discern and avoid the dangerous teaching that can come by way of spiritual wolves.

THE GIFT OF THE TEACHER

The last named group, Paul mentions teachers third in his list of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28 after apostles and prophets (see also Rom. 12:7). Teaching was primarily the responsibility of the local pastors (see above) and was a qualification for someone who serves as an overseer/elder (1 Tim. 3:2; 2:12; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:9).

The apostles, mentioned first on the list, also exercised a teaching responsibility as they planted churches and fulfilled their ministry in imitation of the example of the Twelve (see Acts 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42).

The teachers not only passed on content and explained it, but they also exhorted the hearers to live in conformity with what they were learning. A gifted teacher is someone who equips others to learn and teach others too. As the churches in Asia Minor continued to reach many Gentiles with the gospel of Christ, the need for many gifted teachers was great.

Teaching is often an exposition or application of Scripture (Acts 15:35; 18:11, 25; Rom. 2:20, 21; Col. 3:16; Heb. 5:12), or an explanation and reiteration of apostolic injunctions (1 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:10). In the pastoral epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition and committed to men specially chosen (e.g., 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9). Timothy is urged not only to pursue a teaching ministry himself, but also to entrust what he has learned to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2).

This teaching then has a cascading effect throughout the church as different groups are equipped to teach others (Tit. 2:3) and as whole congregations 'teach and admonish one another' (Col. 3:16). Teachers did not simply impart information or open up new ways of thought. They urged their hearers to live by what they taught (Eph. 4:20-21). So important is this ministry for building the body of Christ that provision is made for its continuity for succeeding generations.

We encourage churches to reach out to recognised teachers within our ranks when elders are grappling with theological matters or need input on doctrinal papers they have written. Teachers would also be of service when investing in emerging teachers, or training elders. While we never want local elders to outsource their responsibility to wrestle with complex theological matters, we have seen the benefit of inviting in those mature and well versed, particularly when navigating dilemmas or clearly articulating complex matters.

PASTORS AND TEACHERS: ONE GIFT OR TWO?

Before concluding this section, it is worth pausing on a question that is sometimes raised as to whether we are correct to see pastors and teachers as two separate gifts to the church. This question arises largely because the term 'teachers' in Ephesians 4:11 lacks the definite article before it. Does this mean then that Paul is describing one gift of 'the pastors who are teachers' rather than two separate gifts of 'the pastors' and 'the teachers'?

Firstly, we should note that in describing ‘the apostles and prophets’ in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 the definite article is absent before the term ‘prophets’. In each of these cases Paul clearly has two separate ministries in view, not one ministry of ‘apostles who prophesy’.

Secondly, as noted above, the gifts of pastor and teacher do overlap to a considerable degree: pastors must teach, and teachers must have pastoral goals. However, we also know from practical experience that some who are gifted pastors may not be especially proficient at publicly preaching or expositing the word. Equally, experience tells us that there are gifted teachers who are not especially effective in pastoral ministry.

For these exegetical and practical reasons, we see the gifts of pastors and teachers as overlapping (as do all the gifts to some extent) but distinct.

Eldership Team - Question 2:

Who do we, or could we, see functioning in the life of our team and our church in the above ways?

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IN CONCLUSION

Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher, in partnership with the Apostolic, are given 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. (Eph. 4:11-13) It is our sincere hope that these gifts would increasingly be at work in the local church and across our movement.

Understanding strengtheners in Advance

While most of this document focuses on the five gifts of Ephesians 4, we have, over the years, come to use a single broader term, 'strengtheners', within Advance. This includes a broader group of people who may be emerging, or are already recognised in one of the Ephesian 4 gifts, as well as those recognised as being a 'strengtheners' to churches in a more practical area, like worship, kids, youth, administration, staffing, finance, etc. All of these different types of gifts are actively used to strengthen our churches in different ways, without the need to rigidly define the gifting, assign a title, or focus on terminology, or measure of gift.

This strengtheners terminology has partially come about in reaction to what we see as the overuse of Ephesians 4 terms (especially 'apostle' and 'apostolic') in some circles. However, we have found it helpful in relieving the pressure to overly define who we can gather, invest in, and deploy to be a blessing to others.

As we consider these broader strengtheners, we would encourage churches to lean in with intentionality towards these gifts as well, as they can meaningfully contribute to everything from general friendship and support to specific equipping in your church.

When inviting any Ephesian 4 gift or strengthener into your church, it is worth considering the following questions:

1. Who are they to us, or who do we hope they will become?

Help clarify how your church is aiming to receive them by asking "what kind of relationship is this?"

- ▶ Is the strengthener a gift to this church who is being asked simply to make a one-off contribution in a particular area?
- ▶ Is the strengthener a coach to this church who is providing longer term help in some specific area in the church?
- ▶ Or (even if it may not be their primary gifting) is the strengthener being recognised in a more apostolic function to your church, as an older brother/father type?
- ▶ Is there a hope for this relationship to develop into more than the current invitation over time?

- ▶ How long do we anticipate this relationship lasting? Is it for a moment, a season, or indefinite?

2. Who are we to them?

As with all Ephesians 4 gifts, it is important to recognise that every strengthener has a capacity and limit to the number of churches they can help and serve. Therefore, it is important that in any strengthening relationship, the strengthener is also clear on what the expectations of the church are and has clarified what their capacity is to help. Strengtheners also need to gain clarity on which churches they are helping and how they are doing so.

Eldership Team - Question 3:

Are there any other more general strengtheners we believe our church would benefit from and want to invite in? How often would we do this and what would the nature of the strengthening relationship be: friend, gift, coach, or oversight as an 'older brother' or 'father' type? Do they have capacity to serve us in an ongoing way?

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Church-to-church partnerships

We love it when Advance churches build together, bless each other, and form strong bonds between churches, eldership teams, youth, staff, etc. Most often this happens between churches in close geographical proximity, but it is also possible in different nations where churches send teams to be a blessing to another church and strengthen partnership. Sharing prayer pointers, news and updates in Sunday church meetings and prayer meetings and giving stage time to interviews when visiting teams are around, are all great ways of strengthening these partnerships between churches.

Eldership Team - Question 4:

Are there any specific churches that we believe we could build a church-to-church partnership with, where we would be able to strengthen them and/or they could strengthen us?

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Stewarding the leadership gifts in your church by sending and sowing

While we recognise that not every church will have established and available leaders to send and sow beyond themselves, we encourage you that every church has something to offer in some way. We would love your elders to think through the power of partnership and how your leaders may be of service in strengthening other churches or leaders. It is vital for health, longevity, and the priority of the local church that this is agreed to and commissioned by the local eldership team and that the leader's spouse is brought in on the decision of sending them to serve elsewhere.

Eldership Team - Question 5:

Are there any leaders that we aim to sow towards strengthening other churches? If, so how regularly will we be able to release them to serve beyond our context and how will we sow into sending them financially? How much capacity do they have to serve in this way and what will this mean for their family?

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