

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The New Testament Pattern

The importance of the church can scarcely be overstated. It is that which God purchased with the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28). The church is that which Christ loves, nourishes, and cherishes (Eph. 5:25), and which He shall present to Himself blameless in all her glory one day (v27).

Building His church constitutes Christ's principal work in the world today (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, it is necessary that a local church (or assembly) give prayerful consideration to the teaching of the New Testament as to its purposes, activities and organization, recognizing that:

- The New Testament does not attempt to cover every detail relating to church practice. Indeed it may well be that the New Testament is deliberately silent on certain issues which may be handled differently depending upon the culture, the local situation, the composition of the assembly, etc.
- Much of what the New Testament contains relating to church order is in reference to the practices of early churches rather than in specific commandments. Care has to be taken in determining which of these practices were of local or temporary nature rather than for all churches in all places at all times.

There is diversity of opinion among Christians on the operating practices of the local church, but the elders of each church must take a stand on what they believe to be Biblical and appropriate.

Church Government

A New Testament assembly of believers stands accountable to the Lord alone, an independent unit which owes no allegiance to any religious system established and controlled by men. However, there is a prescribed pattern for leadership within a local church, involving both **elders** and **deacons** (Phil. 1:1).

Elders

Leadership of an assembly is the responsibility of a plurality of men only. The idea of one "minister" or "pastor" over a local church is wholly foreign to the Scriptures.

From Acts 20:17-38, and I Peter 5:1-3 we see that the terms "elders" and "overseers" are used of the same individuals and are applied to those who "shepherd" and "take care of the flock". In other words, elders, overseers (or bishops), and pastors (or shepherds) are all describing the same workers in the church.

Elders are not a board of officials set as overlords of an assembly but labourers among the saints (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Elder emphasizes their maturity; overseer emphasizes their responsibility; shepherd emphasizes their ministry to heed, lead, feed and guard the local flock. These men (the words are always used in the plural) are to fulfill the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

It is the Holy Spirit who “makes” (sets) overseers in the local assembly (Acts 20:28). The Word of God knows nothing of the appointment of elders by ecclesiastical authorities, or by election by congregations. It is the responsibility of the existing elders as spiritual guides to be on the lookout for brethren having the requisite qualifications (2 Tim.2:2), and indicate them to the assembly. Such would then join the others in their prayers and counsels. The elders will then make the final decision on the recognition of a new elder.

Deacons

While elders are called to spiritually guide an assembly, deacons are called to service within the assembly.

In Greek the word “deacon”, which is “diakonos”, describes a waiter, a messenger, a steward, and a servant. The nature of their service is practical (Acts 6:1-4). But practical work is spiritual work when done for Christ and the kingdom. Therefore, those responsible for the leadership or co-ordination of the various assembly activities, including the administration of financial matters, are performing the work of deacons.

Deacons are recognized by the assembly taking into account the spiritual qualifications that are required (1 Tim. 3:8-13). From 1 Tim. 3: 8,11,12 we conclude that the office of deacon limits eligibility to men.

Assembly Participation

For an assembly to flourish spiritually it cannot be dependent on “one man” or “one gift.” All those in fellowship in the assembly have a Biblical responsibility to support the ministry of the body. This will be done in accordance with the gifts they have received from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-14; Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Pet.4:10-11; Rom. 12:3-8).

The elders will provide opportunities for believers’ gifts to be revealed and developed. For example, it is the responsibility of elders to arrange for public teaching. Since the Holy Spirit has not endowed every believer with the gift of teaching, not everyone will be asked to participate in this aspect of the ministry.

Men’s participation— The breaking of bread

In meetings where spontaneous participation is in order (e.g. the Lord’s Supper, also designated ‘the breaking of bread’), the men are encouraged to audibly minister.

The prime purpose of the Lord's Supper is not to minister to the saints, as in other meetings of the church, but to minister to the heart of God through appropriate reading of Scriptures, worshipful hymns, and prayers expressing to God the worthiness of our Saviour.

Partaking in the bread and cup is restricted to believers only. Westend Bible Chapel welcomes anyone who names the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, and is living in fellowship with Him (1 Cor.11:27), to participate. If someone has not yet accepted salvation in Christ, or if he is unsure of his relationship with Christ, we would ask that he be an observer only and not partake of the bread or cup.

Women's ministry

An assembly cannot function properly without the ministry of women. Therefore, God has given to women as well as to men both speaking and serving gifts. However, God has also placed restrictions on the *public* participation of women in meetings of the local church. This is not an arbitrary choice, nor does it reflect less spirituality or giftedness; it is a scriptural mandate relating to church order.

Consequently, women (qualified by their particular spiritual gift) are able to lead women's Bible study classes, disciple other women and teach children. They may also be involved in evangelism among women, hospitality and other ministries, which do not require them to exercise authority over the man. But the instruction given in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:8-12 precludes women leading the assembly in prayer, in praise and worship, and assuming the role of a teacher in the church gatherings.

Head-Covering for Christian Women *

In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 we find there are two distinct lessons which deal with the head. The word *head* in this context is the figurative one of *authority*, the implication of which is subjection to that authority. Accordingly, the first lesson is a lesson in **headship** (authority); the second one, not as easily discerned, is a lesson in **glory**.

- **Man**

Man must not cover his head in the assembly because he is "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7, Gen.1:26-27). Image is representation, and glory is manifestation. When Adam was made, he was given the responsibility of representing God and implementing His will upon on earth. The physical head of the man is a symbol which expresses the authority and glory of Christ, his spiritual Head.

In a church gathering, Christ's authority and glory must not be concealed. Any covering on the man would veil Christ's glory and deny His authority (1 Cor.11:3). For this twofold reason man must not cover his head when he comes in the presence of God.

- **Woman**

Man's authority, as a stewardship from God, is not to be held in dishonour (1 Cor. 11:5; cf. 1Tim. 2:12). Therefore, a woman should place a sign of authority on her head (1 Cor. 11:10).

The symbol on her head is a manifestation of her submission to her husband, and God's designed order in creation—God, Christ, man and then woman (1 Cor.11:3). For man did not come from the woman, but the woman came from man, and was created *for* man (1 Cor.11:9).

As the long hair for a woman represents the proper covering (Gr., *penhobion*, 1 Cor. 11:15b), of her subjection in the natural realm, so the head-covering is the proper symbolic covering (Gr., *katalupto*, 1 Cor. 11:10), of her subjection in the spiritual realm.

In the natural realm, it is a glory or honour to her if she keeps her covering—her hair long, that is (1 Cor. 11:15), and a disgrace if she doesn't (1 Cor. 11: 6). The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. A woman with a head-covering brings honour and glory to God. If she chooses to remain uncovered, she dishonours and shames her figurative head (“and the head of the woman is man”, 1 Cor. 11:5). It is an act by which God's order of headship is challenged and put in disrepute.

Furthermore, in 1 Cor. 11:7, the woman is not spoken of as the image of man, but as his glory. The glory of man must not be manifest in spiritual exercises; therefore that glory must be covered. No glory but Christ's is to be displayed at the gatherings.

So it is, that the women are to wear head-coverings, for two reasons. One reason is to make known God's authority, as conceded to man and the other reason is for the shielding of man's glory.

- **Angels**

When a woman comes into a church gathering with her head covered, she performs a ministry to the hosts of heaven (1 Cor.11:10; Eph. 3:10). She becomes to angels an object lesson of submission to **divine headship**. In beholding man with his head uncovered, they witness the **unshielded glory of God** and **His accepted authority!**

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered (1Cor. 11:13)?

Believers' Baptism

The rite of water baptism is not a requirement for salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8). We therefore reject the age-old heretical and deceptive teaching of baptismal regeneration.

According to the pattern and the precept of the New Testament baptism is for those who have been saved (Acts 2:41). Born-again believers follow Christ in baptism out of obedience because He commands it (Matt. 28:18-20).

All who were baptized in the New Testament were *fully immersed* (Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:38-39), as a demonstration of faith in Christ and identification with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6).

There is absolutely no evidence in the Word of God that John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ, or any of his disciples ever baptized any infants. Baptism is conditioned upon believing, which comes through a personal and intelligent hearing of the gospel (Acts 2:41; 16:31-34). Candidates for baptism are expected to be mature enough to explain their experience of salvation and understand the implications of baptism.

Membership

Strictly speaking, the only church membership spoken about in the New Testament refers to the act of placing a new believer into the Body of Christ. This happens the moment one is saved (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph.5:30). We have no members list, but do receive into fellowship those whom Christ has already received (Rom. 15:7; 16:1-2).

Being received into this fellowship means you are ready to embrace the privileges of local church life and willing to accept your responsibilities with us. These include regular attendance at the meetings of the church (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25). The exercise of your gift for the up-building of others (1 Pet. 4:10). Submitting to one another, especially in obedience to the elders (Heb. 13:17), and sharing as the Lord enables you in the financial needs of the assembly (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7) as an act of worship (Heb. 13:16).

Discipline

The Lord has entrusted the local church with the authority and responsibility to discipline those in the assembly who are guilty of flagrant sin or serious doctrinal error, the objective being that the erring believer might be restored to fellowship with the Lord and those in the assembly (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).

The elders provide leadership in disciplinary actions but discipline is a collective responsibility. Discipline may eventually involve exclusion from participation in ministry and/or communion at the Lord's Supper. Other action may be taken as deemed appropriate by the elders and the assembly, in light of various examples in Scripture (Matt.18:17; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; Tit. 1:10- 11; 3:9-11).

It is important that the one who is welcomed back after discipline should demonstrate meekness, love, humility, godly sorrow and repentance. It is desirable that individual disputes be handled quickly and discreetly, between the offender and the offended alone (Matt. 5; 23-24; 15:15). If no reconciliation takes place, a third party should be

sought as mediation (Matt.18:16). Only if that fails is the matter brought to the assembly.

Lawsuits Among Believers

We believe that civil lawsuits among believers violate the teaching of Scripture and are a discredit to the name of Christ. Specifically, three reasons are given for this prohibition: our witness to the world is jeopardized; such lawsuits reflect the secular values of greed and an unwillingness to suffer wrong; and such lawsuits demean the leadership of a church, since the elders or appointed church leaders should be capable of resolving such disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). When such disputes arise they should be brought to the attention of the church leadership for guidance, instruction, and if necessary, mediation or arbitration.

Giving

Each believer is responsible as a steward to God for all that he or she has and should, out of love to the Lord and as an act of worship, give to Him financially (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:9). The Bible teaches that giving should be done *devotedly* (Phil. 4:18), *voluntarily* (2 Cor.9:7), *liberally* (2 Cor. 9:6), *cheerfully* (2 Cor. 9:7), *regularly* (1 Cor. 16:2), and *proportionately* as God has prospered (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:11-12). An offering is received from believers at the Lord's Supper. Funds are not solicited, especially not from unbelievers (3 Jn. 1:7).

Finances

Envelopes are made available and a number is assigned for recording purposes to those wishing receipts for Income Tax purposes. An effort is made to keep information confidential by recording the amounts given throughout the year against each number. This information is then recorded by the Treasurer who issues the annual receipts at the end of the calendar year.

The ministry of the assembly includes supporting any workers approved by Westend Bible Chapel and from other assemblies. For legal purposes donations earmarked for a particular worker are not acceptable. The donations for particular workers can simply be enveloped with Missionary Fund checked off. The elders will judiciously discern how the particular funds should be distributed.

Donations to other charities should be sent directly to these charities.

Each month expenses for the operation and ministry of the assembly are paid and all funds remaining are disbursed to the work of the Lord at home and abroad. Retention of funds for any purpose (e.g. for capital expenditures) and the amounts involved and the manner of setting the funds aside must be approved by the elders. A financial statement for the calendar year is prepared and made available to those in fellowship at the Annual General Meeting.

In order for a group of believers to purchase and own a building in Quebec which can be qualified for tax-free considerations, it must be incorporated or have a trustee agreement with appointed trustees. In either case the assembly is required to conduct an annual meeting to confirm (usually by acclamation) such statements as are required by law. Westend Bible Chapel is a charitable trust and this requires an annual confirmation of the appointed trustees. The rules and regulations of Revenue Canada are applied to our financial accounting.

Trustees

They, of course, are a non-Biblical, but contemporary necessity in some societies. Trusteeship is not anti-Biblical. Trustees hold the property in the name of the group to prevent legal complications when someone dies. If the property were held in individual names, then it would not belong to the group, but the individual's portion would pass to his heirs (who might be unbelievers) upon his death. Having trustees prevents such complications.

Missions

The assembly is committed to the support of missions at home and abroad, with primary attention to those commended from Canadian assemblies. The involvement of individuals within the assembly in missions is encouraged (Matt. 28:18-20). The great commission calls on all believers to be engaged in the work of the Lord and to have a global vision. The purpose of missions involvement is to further the work of the Lord elsewhere, increase awareness of missions among those in the assembly and provide exposure to Christian service.

Commendation to Christian service is an action of a local assembly in which those in the assembly:

- recognize the call of God to individuals in the assembly (Acts 13:2)
- have some understanding of the work to be undertaken (Acts 13:1; 14:26)
- know the workers and their qualifications for the work (Acts 16:2)
- express their fellowship and oneness with the workers in sending them forth (Acts 13:3);
- hand the workers over to the Lord for His blessing (Acts 14:26; 15:40);
- maintain an ongoing interest in the workers and their work (Acts 14:27; 15:40).

“Short term service” is used to describe a number of opportunities to serve the Lord in various capacities and time periods. Students, retired persons and others may go to assist a missionary for a few weeks or months, and be engaged in preaching and teaching or construction and other technical support. Some may go to assist during times of natural disasters or other overwhelming needs.

Those considering missions service, whether of a short term or longer term nature, should do so in consultation with the elders.

MSC Canada is a service organization, which forwards funds to assembly commended missionaries around the world. Anyone wishing to send money to missionaries in addition to those supported by the assembly may use MSC Canada for this purpose. For further information, refer to MSC's web page at www.msccanada.org

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** The foregoing has set out our position at Westend Bible Chapel as to why some of our lady members cover their heads at the gatherings. However, these gatherings are public meetings, and visitors come to hear the Gospel being preached, and the Word of God being taught. We like all visitors to know that they are welcome on these occasions whether or not they share our convictions about the head-covering.*

Update 2012

WESTEND BIBLE CHAPEL