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**(Note:** This is a work in process. These understandings are in development. There is the sense that God is speaking, but also that we are to pursue further discernment. Responses from others to this paper are earnestly sought and highly valued.)

# **Apostolic Community**

By George Miley

## **Working Definitions**

### **What is Apostolic Ministry?**

- A ministry given by Christ to chosen individuals (Ephesians 4:11),
- Appointing them ambassadors of the gospel of the kingdom of God (Romans 1:1),
- Especially in regions and among populations where God's kingdom is unknown/little known (Romans 15:20),
- Resulting in spiritual breakthroughs and the birth of new works of God (Acts 14:23),
- Carried out by those who are Godly in character (1 Corinthians 4:9-13),
- Who provide spiritual oversight and fathering to these new works and their leaders (1 Corinthians 4:15-16).

### **What is an Apostolic Team?**

- A relatively small (perhaps 2-13) cohesive group of people,
- Called by God to apostolic ministry,
- Led by apostolic leader(s),
- Bonded together in Godly love and relationship,
- With a rich diversity of giftings that complement the apostolic,
- Who are pioneering kingdom breakthroughs into new areas,
- And are being inwardly transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

### **What is an Apostolic Band?**

- Picture a "band" as a developmental stage beyond "team".
  - A team is smaller and more cohesive.
  - A band is broader in scope and personnel,
  - It may include more than one team,
  - And individuals who are not part of the team(s) but have vital roles,
  - It makes up an expanding ministry network, loosely defined and organized.
  - Which may intersect with other bands or networks,
  - Whose parameters can only be defined by God.
- In Acts 13, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark began as a team,
- By Acts 28 the broader network of Paul's co-workers and relationships could be thought of as a band.

### **What is an Apostolic Community?**

- Picture a "community" as a developmental stage beyond "band".
- A community is more defined and developed.
- Relationships among members are more established.

### **What is an Apostolic Center?**

- It is a physical place, including a facility or facilities.
- It is home base for an apostolic community and its ministry.
  - It includes housing for individuals, families and guests.
  - It provides a meeting place for community gatherings for worship, prayer, teaching, fellowship, etc.
  - It houses operational support for community activities.
  - It allows for ministry to those beyond the community.
- The community and its ministry are not restricted to the center. Members may live elsewhere. Ministry can happen elsewhere.
- It is a coordinating hub for the spiritual oversight and operational support of an expanding, multi-faceted ministry.

**What is “The New Monasticism?”** “The renewal of the church will come from a new type of monasticism, which has only in common with the old an uncompromising allegiance to the Sermon on the Mount. It is high time men and women banded together to do this.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer – quoted in Celtic Daily Prayer.

**In my thinking these terms are closely related. I hold deep affection for them all:**

- Apostolic Community
- Apostolic Center
- The New Monasticism

**My preference is Apostolic Community.**

- An Apostolic Center becomes fruitful only when Apostolic Community is a reality.
- When Apostolic Community ceases, the Apostolic Center becomes a monument.
- I would like to include an apostolic component in a view of The New Monasticism.

**I am aware of the concept of monastic vocation.**

- I desire to learn (be taught) more about it—one important reason for this paper.
- I know those who have been called to it, and have the deepest respect for them.
- My understanding of it is that people experience God’s call to the separated life
  - To minister to the Lord, and
  - To grow in intimacy with Him and likeness to Him

**My sense of how God is calling us => The contemplative and the apostolic belong together**

- The contemplative life creates a context for the soul to grow in intimacy and likeness to God.
- Growth in intimacy and likeness to God deepens the experience of God’s love for the world
- A deepening experience of God’s love for the world catalyzes the apostolic impulse.
- Apostolic expression, over time, returns the soul to the pursuit of intimacy with God.
- There is a mature life in God that is a gracious waltz between the contemplative and the apostolic.

**Core values of healthy Apostolic Community:**

- It is contemplative. It has passion for intimacy with God.
- It is apostolic. It has passion for God's glory to fill the earth.
- It is relational. It has passion to share Christ's life in community.

## **Some Sources of Inspiration**

**Moses in the desert:** Moses developed into one of the most influential leaders in history. He had no army, political base, social influence or financial resources, yet he freed an unruly tribe of people from captivity to the most powerful ruler on earth—Pharaoh of Egypt. He then molded them into a nation, giving them a land, a religious heritage, and a set of laws unequalled in moral excellence. None of this can be explained by human factors alone. It was the result of God's supernatural anointing upon him. During forty years of desert solitude Moses developed an intimacy with God that prepared him to effectively fulfill this calling.

**David in the pasture:** The book of Psalms, one of the most widely read and enduring collections of writings ever assembled, is dominated by the writings of David. Its "genius" has been unchallenged by 30 centuries of worshippers and scholars. The wisdom and insight contained on its pages were formed during years of solitude and contemplation in God's presence while attending sheep. As leader and king, David also excelled. Like Moses, his life combined intimacy with God formed in solitude, and strong leadership unexplainable except for the supernatural hand of God upon him.

**Elijah in the desert:** We have no record of anything he wrote. Like Moses, he was without any of the trappings of human power or influence. He too was a man of the desert. The first time we meet him in Scripture he announces that there will be neither dew nor rain except by his word. He was sent by God to challenge Ahab, the most evil king ever to reign in Israel, and his 400 priests of Baal. Elijah, virtually single-handedly, turned a rebellious Israel back to the God of their fathers. The anointing of God for great acts was the source of his power, born in intimacy with him, cultivated during years of solitude in the desert.

**Jesus alone with his Father:** Jesus is our first New Testament model of combining the contemplative and apostolic life-styles. Called an apostle in Hebrews 3, and having embraced a demanding ministry schedule, His life was characterized by repeated, intentional withdrawal—in the years before his public ministry began, before his confrontation with Satan, before he named the twelve, after he had ministered to the crowds, and hours before he faced the cross. His example is characterized by seasons of solitude in the presence of his Father, and the demands of pioneering ministry among the multitudes.

**John the Beloved:** The "disciple whom Jesus loved" fathered an apostolic tradition which stands in contrast to that which took its inspiration from Paul. "He who leans on Jesus' breast hears the heart of God" it has been said of John. His life and writings speak to us of a man focused on intimacy with God before outward activity. Yet his influence passes powerfully through church history via Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, John's disciple, who was burned at the stake for his faith; on through the "desert fathers and mothers", next through the powerfully missional Celtic Church, and right up to our present time.

**Paul in the desert:** Having met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul moved into immediate action, preaching that Jesus was the Messiah. This first burst of energy was to be expected from someone with Paul's make-up, yet we have no record of any lasting fruit from this initial, not-yet-mature expression of ministry. Time subsequently spent in contemplation in the Arabian desert was crucial to Paul's maturing in Christ. There were something like ten years between the initial visitation (Acts 9) and his release into the mature phase of his apostolic ministry (Acts 13). In Paul, we see the flowing together of the contemplative and apostolic.

**The Desert Fathers and Mothers:** In the third and fourth centuries, Roman Christians, living in the increasingly disintegrating and hedonistic culture around them, discovered the redemptive nature of solitude to heal, protect and develop the soul. They began to retreat into the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, first pursuing a life of solitude as individuals, but later discovering the value of forming communities of contemplation. Their writings and the wisdom they contain are still inspiring and instructing Christians today. Their experience became a key initial influence in the development of monasticism.

**Patrick:** This apostle to the idolatrous Celtic peoples of Ireland in the fifth century is a startling example of God's power resting upon an individual. His initiatives in spiritual battle against entrenched forces of darkness in the evangelization of Ireland resulted not only in the founding of churches but also the establishing of monasteries. The ancient hymn attributed to him, Patrick's Breastplate, is a passionate expression of both intimacy with God and pioneering vision that has endured for sixteen centuries.

**The Celtic Church:** Allowed to develop for a couple of centuries before being brought under the influence of the church formed within the Roman culture, the Celtic Church was creative, spontaneous, community oriented and wonderfully apostolic. The abbot (head of the monastery—more apostolic in his role) carried responsibility for the oversight of churches that the bishop (head of the diocese—more pastoral and administrative in his role) carried in the Roman system. My understanding is that the apostolic influence of the abbots contributed strongly to the missional passion and activities of the Celtic Church. Church history contains many examples of apostolic leaders functioning from a monastic base.

**The Monastic Movement:** Monastic legalism and extremism, especially in medieval times, represent a tragic departure from the ways and teachings of Jesus. But I understand the centuries-long pattern of monasticism as an expression of the New Testament apostolic structure found initially in Jesus and the twelve, and then the apostolic teams of Acts. I am impressed when we find the physical location of monastic buildings located adjacent to church buildings. This is important symbolism. Members of the monastic community were integrated into the local fellowship while also separated for their own calling.

**The Moravians:** A community of approximately six hundred people, located in a small village in a far-eastern corner of Germany, became the source of an apostolic movement of historic dimensions. The Moravians sent out more missionaries than all Protestants before them combined. A key component of their mission strategy was to

establish communities (a form of “Protestant monasticism” or “new monasticism”) wherever they went as bases and springboards for evangelization and church planting work. They established a twenty-four-hour a day prayer watch that endured for one hundred years.

## **My Journey in Apostolic Community**

**The Bakht Singh assemblies of India:** Bakht Singh, an Indian apostle and church planter, became my first mentor in the life and structure of the local church. When I first met him, and came to know his work, a couple hundred assemblies had been planted through the ministry of his apostolic band, a work rooted in and coming forth from local churches. This would serve as a wonderful case study for those who would champion the local church as the apostolic structure.

**The ships LOGOS and DOULOS:** Though I did not understand it at the time, my fifteen years of leading the ship ministry of Operation Mobilization (OM) in its pioneer phase was in-depth training in founding and leading apostolic community. On LOGOS we were one hundred forty people from some twenty countries, and on DOULOS three hundred twenty-five people from some thirty-five countries. We lived and ministered in an intensive community environment. In a context of almost non-stop outreach, we learned firsthand that our energy was unsustainable without going deeper with God.

**July, 1979, in Rosario, Argentina:** During the first visit of DOULOS to Latin America, one day I was in prayer, walking along the bank in Rosario, Argentina, near to where the ship was berthed. I was crying out to God for direction, for Him to show the next developmental stage for the ship ministry. In prayer, I saw in my mind and heart the following picture:

There was a group of people. I don’t know how many there were—several hundred. They were worshipping together, praying together and sharing their lives together. They were like a fire, a spiritual center. People were being drawn into this center from all over for warmth and nourishment. People were also being sent out from this center into the world with the gospel.

That picture has never left me. It has been the daily, foundational motivating energy in my life ever since.

This is a picture of apostolic community.

**The Ships Headquarters in Mosbach, Germany:** In 1980 Hanna and I moved to Germany to give leadership to the development of this crucially-needed next stage in the expanding OM Ships ministry. A core value for us in the founding of this headquarters was that it was to be an apostolic community, although we did not yet have that terminology. It was my understanding that this was God’s next step in the picture I had seen in Rosario.

Establishing this headquarters was the most costly and painful thing I have ever done in Christian ministry. My own immaturity and sin, and the consequences that resulted from them, were the root causes of my agony. Although establishing this headquarters

was crucial to the ministry, and although it still serves an international ministry today, this was for me a personal Ishmael.

Through the experience I learned that one can mature significantly in some areas, yet remain blocked and immature in others. I was a prime example. This is especially costly when one is in leadership. Wrong responses can wound not only oneself but also others. It took me a long time to come to the point of being able to allow Jesus to heal me and teach me how to respond to all this in health. When I did, He taught me, healed me and trusted me again. Lord Jesus, you are incredible!

**Antioch Network:** Antioch Network was birthed out of a keen sense that God was forming new wineskins in the area of missions. These new wineskins included a new and renewed understanding of the key role He has designed for the local church in global mission. God had given me a deep sense of calling and passion to champion a high view of the local church.

In the founding of Antioch Network, we fully expected churches to flock to our banner. Here we were, proclaiming the awesome beauty, potential and gifting of churches, and advocating a meaningful, strategic and participatory role for them in mission.

But events did not turn out that way. Even up to this writing, it has not been easy for most (not all) churches to find themselves in our message. It has been fairly unusual to find a church able to relate in any meaningful way with the suggestion that she is called and empowered for apostolic pioneering among the unreached. There are wonderful and beautiful exceptions to this, but by and large this is our reality.

Does this reflect something negative in churches? I do not believe it does. Could it be that our expectations are where the problem lies? Yes, it certainly could be. We need the honesty, humility and courage to revisit our expectations of the church, and ask God to give us further insight. Could it be that we have confused the local church and the apostolic structure? Could it be that we have expected the local church to do what God designed the apostolic structure to do?

**The International Prayer Days in the Eifel (Germany):** In the summer of 2000 Hanna and I returned for a brief visit to her hometown, Gemünd, in the Eifel region of Germany. Our “plan” was only to be there overnight. During those hours the Holy Spirit grabbed us and catapulted us into one of the most gripping journeys with God of our entire lives. That day inaugurated for us a major life transition.

God is taking us back to this place of profound childhood trauma for Hanna. As a Jewish child, she spent her first seven years there during the Hitler time. As she boarded a children’s transport to flee to England, five weeks before the outbreak of World War II, she said goodbye to her parents in the Cologne train station for the last time. She never saw them again.

Now God is taking her/us back as ambassadors of the gospel of the kingdom of God—a kingdom characterized by truth and love—by repentance, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, deliverance and restoration. It is a kingdom immediately accessible to all through Jesus. He is the Way God the Father has established for all humanity to be

delivered from the consequences of our sin and return home to our heavenly Father. There is no other way.

As we have returned to Germany, God has given us some of the most wonderful German friends and brothers and sisters in Christ imaginable. We are blessed beyond measure. God's ways are beyond our ways, and indescribably beautiful.

We sense God establishing an ongoing work in the Eifel, born out of seasons of intercession. We believe our immediate focus is to be something different than planting churches. We are to be preparing the way for Jesus to come to the Eifel as King. When He comes, He will bring his kingdom (his reign) with Him. What role does apostolic community play in all this?

## **The Apostolic Structure and the Local Church**

I well remember during an Antioch Network Annual Gathering of Churches, after I had done a 4-session workshop on apostolic ministry, including a session on apostolic structures, a young leader approached me with this question, "Can the local church be the apostolic structure?"

For those familiar with Antioch Network, let me state here that I believe this is an absolutely crucial question facing this ministry: **Can the church be the apostolic structure?**

Here is my understanding:

1 – Apostolic ministry is not a function of a structure, but of leaders who are called and gifted apostolically by God. When apostolic leaders are released to express what God has placed within them, apostolic ministry happens.

2 – Once apostolic leaders are catalyzing apostolic ministry, structure becomes increasingly important. The wrong structure will block apostolic initiation. The appropriate structure will facilitate and release it.

3 – There are apostolic leaders who are senior pastors of churches. When this is the case, the church is going to be increasingly a center of apostolic outreach.

4 – When the senior pastor has not been called and gifted by God apostolically, he will find it difficult to effectively influence and lead the church into pioneering kingdom thrusts. He may desire to do so, but he will lack the instincts, motivation and energy to take the congregation in this direction. This is not a flaw in the senior pastor. It is a matter of God's sovereign choice in calling and gifting.

5 – I am unaware of a church, even when the senior pastor is apostolic in his calling and gifting, that has been effective in pioneering kingdom initiatives without either partnering with an existing apostolic structure or forming one of its own. (Here we could also use terms like "mission organization" or "parachurch organization" or "sodality", etc. I have no problem with these terms—I just prefer "apostolic structure". For me it keeps clearly before us the purpose for which the structure has been formed.)

## Activities I Envision in an Apostolic Center

1. **Worship.** Daily, and for extended seasons
2. **Intercession.** Daily, and for extended seasons
3. **Solitude.** Separate facilities might be needed
4. **Healing.** In the Presence of Jesus
5. **Discipleship.** Training the soul toward Christlikeness
6. **Teaching.** For community members and guests
7. **Hospitality.** For guests whom God would bring
8. **Work.** In support of the Center's life and ministry
9. **Compassion.** Meeting human needs in the name of Jesus
10. **Social justice.** Advocating for the wronged
11. **Mentoring.** Especially emerging leaders
12. **Support for churches.** In the immediate area and beyond
13. **Administration.** For the ministries of the Center
14. **Networking.** With other works of God
15. **Sending out.** Of new apostolic teams

